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THE NEW ANDROMEDA

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE LONDON PLOT.

HER HIGHNESS'S SECRETARY.

YELLOW AND WHITE.

A BRIDE OF JAPAN.

THE MANDARIN.

CLAUDIA POLE.

THE GRAND DUKE.

ONE FAIR ENEMY.

CLEODORA.

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THE
NEW ANDROMEDA

BY
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EVELEIGH NASH
FAWSIDE HOUSE
LONDON

1909

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BOOK I
PERSEUS AND ANDROMEDA

I

THE car had stopped on the hill-side for its owner to admire the fine view offered by a wide wooded valley, dotted here and there with patches of green field, which stretched away on his left until brought up sharp against the sky-line by a high range of distant hills. Up this valley, stirring the grasses ever so lightly, came the softest of southerly breezes, warm with the sun which sailed through a cloudless sky. No sign was there of man or beast. Just then the world was all his own.

He opened wide his mouth and filled his lungs with a deep draught of the delicious air. He was a man of some thirty-five years of age, dark of complexion, straight of feature, with the wide serious eyes of a poet.

‘What do you think of it, Ixion?’ he asked, addressing the man at the wheel.

‘She took it like butter, sir,’ replied Ixion, otherwise John Smales.

Carey Vermont heaved a portentous sigh and straightway collapsed.

‘Go on,’ he moaned ; ‘oh, Lord, go on !’

Then a curious thing happened. There was a sudden crash, the engine raced like mad, making a grinding noise ; but instead of going forward, the car began to run backwards until pulled up by the brake. Ixion at once shut off his engine and sprang to the ground.

‘What’s the matter now ?’ inquired the owner in a resigned voice, peering over the side of the car.

‘Just what I’m wondering, sir. Something serious, I’m afraid.’

Carey Vermont shook his head and smiled. He thanked heaven that he was a philosopher. No man has a right to go touring in a motor car who is not.

Smales opened the bonnet and peered in, but was quickly convinced that the trouble was not there. In the meantime his master had alighted from the car and joined him.

‘It seemed to me,’ he said, deferentially as became a tyro in these matters, ‘that the grinding noise came from somewhere underneath.’

‘Yes, sir, I think you’re right,’ admitted Ixion.

Without more ado he crawled under the car, remaining for some ten minutes or so on the broad of his back. When he crawled out again his face reflected much perturbation.

‘ Yes, sir,’ he announced gravely, ‘ I ’m afraid it is serious. The bevilled wheel is gone.’

‘ Gone ? ’

‘ Cracked ! ’

‘ How the deuce could that have happened ? ’

Smales shook his head.

‘ Must have been sprung, sir.’

He did not think it necessary to inform his master that the fault was probably his through slipping in the clutch too quickly. Such confessions merely complicate matters and lead to no practical results.

‘ What are we to do ? ’

Ixion’s face lengthened perceptibly. It was not by nature a long face, but the dropped jaw added considerably to its significance.

‘ Can’t you mend it ? ’ added the owner a little irritably : ‘ patch it up, or something ? ’

‘ I ’m afraid not. It will require a new wheel.’

Mr. Vermont’s philosophy was likely to prove of service to him now. It was one thing to feel gloriously alone on the hill-top with a perfect 20-h.p. car at his service, but another to find that car suddenly become no more useful than a scrap-heap, and the nearest town some dusty miles distant.

‘ How far off is Guildford ? ’

‘ About five miles, sir.’

‘ Well, John ’—it was always ‘ John ’ when he was serious—‘ there ’s nothing before you but a tramp. Cut along like a good fellow. I suppose we shall have to tow this derelict into port ? ’

‘ Yes, sir.’

‘ Very well. You know what to do. Be as quick as you can. I ’ll sit amid the ruins of Carthage and ruminate on the mutability of—motor cars.’

Ixion swung away up the hill and disappeared over the brow of it. There was a humorous twinkle in Vermont’s eyes as he contemplated the ineffable car. But a short time ago they had dashed through Dorking in all the glory of whirring wheels, throbbing engine, and odorous petrol. Hill or level had come alike to her : gluttonously, insatiably she had eaten up the brown miles of roadway. This last hill she had taken ‘ like butter,’ as Ixion so admirably described it. Over in Aldershot, whither he was dashing, they might have to wait for dinner. Well, that could not be helped either. The man who entrusts his destiny to the modern spirit of speed is putting a premium on delay.

He lit a pipe and sat by the roadside, his feet buried in the rank grasses which grew profusely hereabouts. It was summer, summer in all its abandoned glory. The earth teemed with sweet grasses and sweet smells : there was no room for

another leaf on tree or shrub. Now it was a breath of the pines that reached him : occasionally the sweet cloying taste of clover clung to lip and nostril. The pipe was a sacrilege on such a day. He knocked out the ashes and rose to his feet.

With mock seriousness he apostrophised the car. She was a beautiful creature, the perfection of graceful symmetry, her complexion red and gold. The unimaginative would have spoken of the latter as brass ; but he was not of that kind. He had no need to be practical, for fortune had not been unkind to him. She did not harass him over the taxes, or constrain him to dream incessantly of butcher and baker—vulgar but most potent factors of destiny. In youth he had stuffed his head with the poets : now that a few grey hairs were beginning to show above the ears he occasionally thought of more serious things. Even a poet cannot for ever bathe in the sacred rills of Parnassus.

Moreover, there was no doubt that the car had broken down. That was the plain, unvarnished English of the situation. Pegasus had damaged a wing : Icarus had touched the Ægean. But she was still beautiful in the sun, and showed no sign of wear, tear, or damage.

‘It’s the canker in the rose,’ he muttered :
‘what a pity.’

He knew that Smales, the ever worthy, might be trusted to use all despatch ; also he knew that circumstances arise over which even an indomitable Smales has no authority. Especially do these occur where the irreverent passer-by can make a mock of suffering. Solitude was really created for the misfortunes of motor cars.

The hill-top was not more than a hundred yards away, and insensibly he gravitated towards it. That point reached, he looked round at the wonderful stretch of hill and vale that faded away in the infinite blue. Only a few yards off, the road taken by Ixion dropped sheer into the valley beneath him, where it lost itself in a wilderness of foliage. He pictured that practical one trudging onward in heavy boots, and smiled rather curiously to himself. Then he looked back at his beauty as she lay dozing in the sun, her brass-work all ablaze, her complexion flawless.

‘ I understand now why they call you “ she,” ’ he mused.

On his right a path opened across the summit of the hill, and, almost without thinking, he entered it. For a little distance it twisted through various shades of undergrowth. Summer was revelling here in all her wild luxuriance. As from the shore the sea always seems fuller when the tide is in, so

to him just then did the world seem full of leaves and grasses, and the smell of sweet things. Somewhere in the blue distance a lark was singing : between the pauses he caught the hum of multitudinous life.

Just here the path began to dip a little, growing wilder and more tangled as it went ; but still pursuing it in the same aimless, objectless fashion, he presently found himself on the edge of a small plantation of silver beeches. Here he paused for a while. The track might lead to the other end of the county for all he knew, and just then he recollected that he had left his beautiful one standing unguarded by the wayside. However, he would enter that clump yonder and then return.

He stepped out, carelessly glancing to right and left of him, when on turning a sharp bend he came to a sudden standstill, and fairly gasped for breath.

Before him, not a dozen yards away, was a woman, stark naked, bound to a smooth, straight sapling. Her hair, long and yellow, hung across her shoulders and partly hid her breasts. But she was looking at him, intensely, eagerly, with eyes that gleamed curiously from under heavy level brows.

II

HE stood as one transfixed, then let his glance drop before hers. Usually he reckoned himself a man of resource, but in a situation of this nature he lost all power of initiative, almost of thought. Her voice recalled him to his senses.

‘Please set me free,’ she said.

The voice was clear, cold almost, with a suspicion of irritability. He started like one awaking from a dream: then the blood rushed to his brain, his eyes, and almost blinded him.

‘I beg your pardon,’ he stammered.

It was odd how the commonplaces of life bubbled to the tongue. It seemed to him that had he searched for a year he could not have lighted on a phrase more inept.

Without looking at her, though heaven knows she seemed to fill the whole orbit of his vision, he stole round to the back of the sapling, opening his pocket-knife with fingers that trembled excessively. Her arms had been put round the slender trunk of the young tree, and the wrists bound together with

a silken cord, probably some fastening of cloak or cape. At this he sawed nervously. Also he noticed that her wrists were swollen and bruised, due, no doubt, to violent efforts at freedom. Her shoulders looked red and angry where they had come in contact with the trunk.

As he cut through the last strand he heard her utter a cry of relief, and a sudden, terrifying thought flashed through his brain. Was she going to faint! Happily she was not of the fainting kind. He turned his back on her as he spoke.

‘Where are your clothes?’

‘I haven’t any.’

‘Haven’t any?’ he echoed, aghast.

‘No: they took them away.’

‘They?’

‘The men who did this.’

‘The villains!’

She gave a low, contemptuous laugh.

‘Can’t you get me something—somewhere?’

‘Wait a minute. My car’s over there.’

‘Your car?’

‘We had a breakdown. My man has gone into Guildford for help. I won’t be a second.’

He made an oblique move for the pathway, still keeping his back to her. Then he positively flew on his errand.

In the car was a portmanteau containing a complete change of gear. This he hauled out excitedly, dashed up the hill again and along the path. As he neared the plantation once more he slackened his pace and looked carefully round. There was neither sight nor sign of her ; but from the bushes on his right her voice came to him.

‘ Leave it there. I ’ll see what I can do.’ He set it down. ‘ Is it open ? ’ she asked again. He stooped down and opened it.

‘ Yes.’

‘ Very well. Thanks so much.’

Swiftly he retreated towards the roadway, his mind whirling with conjecture. Below him his red and gold beauty still glistened in the sun. But he saw her only with his eyes. This new white and gold beauty now obsessed his vision. Who was she ? How did she come to be in such a horrible predicament ? In these days, too ! It was monstrous, absurd ! He almost wondered if he had been dreaming.

He sat on the bank by the roadway and lit a cigarette. Phew, this was an anachronism ! Such things did not really happen in these days : they could not. Surely he had been dreaming of wicked knights and maidens in distress ? Dreaming ! But there was no dream about it. There was the

car sure enough, and Smales—Smales was no mediæval dream. Honest Ixion with his honest, blunt face, and his round, dog-like eyes. What a blessing he had not lighted on this discovery. How inexpressibly shocked he would have been !

What was she doing now ? Getting into his things, no doubt. The thought caused a humorous line to form round the corner of his mouth. There was a complete outfit in the portmanteau. Would she know how to put the things on ? Good heavens, if he had only known ! But of course he didn't. How should he ?

The sound of dragging footsteps caused him to spring hastily to his feet and as quickly to glance round. A singular and most grotesque figure came slowly towards him through the leaves : a quaint, white-faced, yellow-haired boy in clothes many sizes too large for him. The coat hung low in the neck and shoulders, and seemed as though it could easily hold two of her : the trousers were unspeakable ! Though she had carefully turned up the extremities, they still sagged and hung about her in the most revolting fashion. Even as it was she was holding up the horrible garment with both hands. Seeing the excruciating look of wonder on his face, she smiled.

‘ You forgot the braces,’ she said.

‘ So I did. How absurd of me ! A thousand pardons.’ But as he only had one pair, which he was wearing at the time, he forbore a fuller explanation.

‘ The shoes are rather large,’ she said plaintively, looking down at them with a sad shake of the head.

He confessed it. They did look monstrous, absurd. Yet he had once thought them rather smart. They were something special in the way of patent leather, something of which his Bond Street bootmaker had been inordinately proud. Certainly they looked grotesque enough on those little feet, encircling those slim ankles.

‘ They ’re horrible,’ he said seriously. ‘ I apologise.’

‘ But better than nothing ? ’

He could not say so. That, however, was a matter of opinion. She had certainly chosen his prettiest socks.

‘ Is that your car ? ’ she asked, pointing down the road, where the Spirit of Speed, her wings folded, lay dozing in the sun.

‘ Yes. Do you think you can walk so far ? ’

‘ Of course.’

He gave her his hand and helped her down the embankment to the road. Then she toddled along beside him, the loose shoes making a curious scraping

sound as they trailed over the gravelled road, yet beating a fantastic rhythm to his whirl of thought. Neither spoke. Certainly she may not have wished to, and as certainly he was thinking of too many things to make commonplace inquiries. Just then any question might have sounded impertinent. All the same he was fairly bubbling with curiosity.

‘What a handsome car!’ she said.

If this was not an effort to put him at his ease he was indeed a dolt. And all the time he had been wondering how he could best mitigate the situation, render it least unpleasant for her. Duly admiring her tact he at once plunged into the merits and demerits of motor cars. She listened amiably, and upon occasion interpolated an illuminating remark. Evidently she knew something of the subject. His amazement deepened.

He helped her aboard, saw her comfortably seated, and spread a rug across her knees. She smiled her thanks, but said nothing. Yet her eyes, deep, dark-blue eyes, seemed intently to watch his every movement. To him they looked curiously dark in so fair a face. At a little distance they appeared almost black. At first he thought they were brightly humorous; then it seemed to him that they were mocking. The mouth, too—a full, red, mocking mouth—was it also laughing, or was it

merely his fancy? He could not be sure. A longer look assured him that the eyes were clear and frank. And then he discovered, or thought he discovered, the cause of that strange concentration of gaze. Her brows, in curious contrast with her hair, were dark and heavy, and instead of being delicately arched, ran almost straight.

‘I’m afraid I can offer you no tea,’ he said, opening a light luncheon basket; ‘but if a weak whisky and soda——’

‘Admirable,’ she said. ‘You are very kind.’

He handed her a plate of sweet biscuits, and then mixed the whisky and soda. Without waiting to say grace she immediately began to munch.

‘I’m literally starving.’

‘How long were you—there?’ he ventured to ask.

‘I don’t know. An hour, I think: perhaps two—three! It seemed like eternity.’

He looked at her with eyes that questioned, begged; but she gave no sign of understanding that look, nor did she make further confession. Her little white teeth bit into the biscuits and cracked them with gusto.

‘I wish I could do more for you,’ he said.

‘I don’t see how you could really do more. I dread to think what might have happened if——’

‘ If ? ’

‘ Oh, well, it didn’t, so we needn’t discuss it. You have mixed this whisky and soda to perfection. It tastes like champagne.’

‘ You must permit me to drive you home,’ he said stolidly.

‘ Home ! ’ she echoed. ‘ That ’s a long way off. And in any case, I thought you told me the car had broken down ? ’

‘ True, but I am expecting my man back with help.’ He looked at his watch. ‘ He ought to be near Guildford now, if he hasn’t gone to sleep on the way.’

She laughed. Somehow he thought it strange that she should laugh. Also she may have observed that look of respectful interrogation, for the corners of her mouth dropped suddenly, and her heavy white lids drooped languidly.

‘ Of course you want to know all about me ? ’

‘ I am entirely at your service,’ he answered.

‘ What if I cannot tell you ? ’

‘ I am still entirely at your service.’

‘ Polite, but perfunctory.’

‘ On the contrary, I am deeply interested.’

Slowly the heavy lids rose and she looked at him with eyes that had neither fear nor shame. But there was a deep searching light in them of which he suddenly became vaguely aware.

‘ You do not know who I am ? ’

‘ In a way—yes.’

‘ In a way ? ’ The glance grew instantly acute.

‘ I have read of you.’

‘ Read of me ? ’

‘ It happened in Ethiopia.’

‘ In Ethiopia ? ’

He was smiling. Her straight brows compressed in a vain endeavour to read his meaning.

‘ I don’t understand.’

‘ Andromeda.’

‘ O—Oh ! Are you a poet, Mr.——’

‘ Vermont—Carey Vermont. No, I dare not hope so.’

‘ Was it not Perseus who saved Andromeda from the Monster ? ’

‘ Yes.’

‘ The parallel is perfect. You also have saved me from a monster.’

‘ It is iniquitous——’ he began hotly.

‘ Perfectly—in every detail. But what can you do with a monster—but kill him ? ’

The little teeth came together : dark flashes of hate shot out of the slumberous eyes.

‘ I ’m sorry,’ he muttered apologetically.

‘ It is a natural curiosity, Mr. Vermont. I only regret that I cannot satisfy it.’

‘ I hope you do not think so ill of me ? ’

‘ Naturally I would think well of men. No, forgive me. I did not mean that.’

‘ I admit justification.’

‘ It was my misfortune to meet with a monster.’

‘ It will be my pleasure to help you, if you will permit me. Tell me how I can be of service ? ’

‘ Tell me what Perseus did with Andromeda ? ’

He smiled. ‘ I suppose he took her home.’

‘ Exceedingly prosaic,’ she remarked.

‘ But natural.’

‘ I wonder.’

He rather liked the native wit of her. Such a woman might be very strong upon occasion.

‘ It is a little awkward, this accident to the car,’ he said ; ‘ but if Ixion returns with another——’

‘ Ixion ? ’

‘ His name is not really Ixion, but Smales—John Smales. It may not be classic, but it’s most respectable.’

‘ A man with a name like John Smales ought to be the pink of propriety.’

‘ He is.’

‘ Do you think it would do for him to know ? ’

‘ I don’t. John has round serious eyes and a quite suburban intelligence. He ought to be in the City and live at Ealing.’

‘ What will he say if he sees me like this ? ’

She spread out her hands in protest. He noticed that they were small, very white, and beautifully modelled. Also that they seemed whiter by contrast with the cruel weals round the wrists.

‘ He will say nothing, being much too well bred ; but what he will think ! ’

‘ We must circumvent this dragon of propriety.’

The eyes were lazily laughing now : also a delicate colour had come to her cheeks. And this coupling of herself with him was the one touch needed to remove mountainous obstructions.

‘ I am in your hands—Andromeda.’

She smiled—perhaps prophetically. But he saw only the bewildering curve of lip, the faint flush that, as he gazed, deepened the wonder of her skin.

‘ Then we must prepare to receive him. Not for worlds would I cause a blush to darken the pure brow of British respectability.’

This jarred on him : he would rather she had not said it. But he was glad she could not plumb the profundities of his Philistinism. Philistinism ! He, Carey Vermont, a private in the great Suburban Army ! A private !—nay, a colonel at least, a veritable major-general ! Herein was the vast superiority of woman. She had no petty prejudices, and not the shadow of a scruple.

‘Do you know,’ she said, ‘I think you ought to fetch that portmanteau. He might miss it.’

Colloquial commonplaces lose all their vulgarity on pretty lips. He thought it a suggestion of superabundant wisdom. The conjunction of the practical with the transcendental is one of woman’s most bewitching charms.

‘I will,’ he said. ‘And oh, by the way, if you should feel cold you might get into that fur coat.’

She smiled a due appreciation of his foresight. He turned away and walked up the hill.

III

IN all the tales of rescue that he had ever read he could not remember one in which the hero, in spite of direful stress, had found his heroine anything but a delightful and felicitous charge. In books the most amazing situations seemed to right themselves automatically ; all trifles were ignored, and only the broad issues thought worthy of consideration. But in reality trifles have a pernicious habit of sprouting until they assume a monstrous growth. The fungus that grows in a night is as nothing to the situation that grows in a moment. Man, and incidentally woman, is still the most bewildering product of nature.

Who was she, and how did she come to be in such a plight ? If she would not tell him, it was obvious he could not ask ; but what in the name of conjecture was he to do with her ? A lady, too : of that there could be no question. Not, perhaps, a lady as one understands the modern application of the word, with its cringing affectations and false modesties ; but something bigger, bolder,—as Cleopatra might

have been a lady, or Marguerite de Valois. Certainly there was no pretence either of glory or of shame. Life was a play in which the situations were arranged with exquisite cruelty, and men and women but a set of mimes who obeyed the rules set down for them by the Great Author. Sometimes the drama was comic, but oftener tragic. Men and women were forced into comicalities by the sheer brutality of life. It was the only thing that saved them from despair.

There was that in this situation, however, which appealed both to his philosophy and his sense of humour; nor could he accept as a tragedy that in which she appeared to see the chief elements of the comic. Of the two the occasion seemed to cause her the less concern. And if she, the chief sufferer, should approach the incident with such apparent nonchalance, how could he play the part of the heavy father? Moreover, he was supremely conscious of not being suitable to such a rôle, and it always had painful associations.

But your true dreamer is always the most practical of persons, else he would never shape his dreams. This adventure had stepped down from the realms of fancy into the bright sunlight of reality, and of a truth it seemed the better for so doing. If a little bewildered, he was not quarrelling with fate;

but the sensation of novelty was a trifle disconcerting.

Also she was a quaintly beautiful creature. He was not sure that she would take life too seriously. Those mocking lips were as yet merely a suggestion of an infinitely singular nature : the mocking glance, was it not indicative of a subtle and keen intelligence ? Nevertheless those eyes were wonderful. He had always been a student of women's eyes, and a great lover of them. Not alone were they the lamps of the soul, the leaves of intelligence, but they were something more than this—the epitome and essence of that subtle distinction of sex which embraces all and more than is expressed by the term feminine. Women have wonderful eyes, nor would he admit that the least prepossessing of them were wholly without significance. For some one there is always a ray of light.

And Andromeda—for so in his mind he called her—had eyes that might have bewildered even the unresponsive Monster. Unconsciously he found himself sighing for the simpler classic days. Such adventures should not befall a hero in these times. They unmanned one. Perseus, gazing, grew instantly enamoured of her loveliness : Carey Vermont, ungallantly, had to turn his back on her. What a century !

Thinking thus, he approached the slender sapling to which she had been bound, and stood for quite a little time in contemplation before it. Then suddenly he leant forward and kissed the place against which her body had rested. Contact with the smooth bole thrilled him inconceivably. He looked up, and there was laughter in his eyes.

The cord with which she had been bound lay where he had dropped it. Stooping down, he picked it up and slipped it into his breast-pocket. Odd that he should be trembling so ! What will-o'-the-wisp was this that fluttered like fire through his brain ?

Andromeda !

Not until he turned to go did he remember the real object of this journey. Eagerly he looked round, but the portmanteau was nowhere to be seen. Then suddenly he recollected that her voice had come to him from the bushes yonder, and thither he went, curiously aglow with a singularly inexplicable sensation.

Screened by the clump of bushes was a little grass plot, and there he found the portmanteau, open, its contents scattered all over the place : here a discarded coat, there a shirt, while socks and other necessary garments lay exposed to the view. He smiled slowly to himself as he gathered them up. Tidiness was evidently one of the dull virtues

at whose shrine she did not worship. Yet it was not without some amusement that he conjured up the picture of her arraying. All things considered, she had done remarkably well—though he had left her neither braces nor hairpins! And what wonderful hair she had!

When he returned to the car he found that she had arrayed herself in the fur coat as he had suggested, and a quaint little figure she looked in its voluminous folds. She saw the smile on his face and greeted him with a serious shake of the head.

‘Like charity,’ she said, ‘it covers a multitude of sins. You are so large, Perseus.’

‘I’m so sorry,’ he began.

‘Please don’t apologise: it’s a good fault. I hate little men. But I did look a hideous fright. Besides, I was afraid of shocking Smales. You’ve no idea how the thought of him appals me. But with this coat on, and a cap and goggles——’ She looked at him appealingly, making a quaint little mouth.

‘Excellent,’ he answered, and forthwith produced both goggles and cap. The latter, like all his other things, was much too large for her, but it confined admirably her wealth of hair. The huge goggles effectually concealed her identity.

‘Now tell me,’ she asked, ‘what do I look like? Positively hideous, eh?’

‘ On the contrary, more delightfully mysterious than ever.’

‘ Ah, so it is the mystery that still seems of such preponderating importance ? I thought men were not curious ? ’

‘ You will admit that the circumstances are a little unusual ? ’

‘ Is that a fault ? ’

‘ On the contrary, it is that which makes the occasion so infinitely charming.’

‘ What if I should be a reincarnation of her whom you rescued so long ago ? ’

‘ A delightful suggestion,’ he assented. ‘ I shall try to believe it.’

‘ Would it be so difficult ? ’

‘ I think not.’

‘ Frankly, you are really a much nobler hero than Perseus. He bargained with her father before setting her free. You made no conditions. I don’t think he could have been a gentleman.’

Her naïve suggestion tickled him immensely. He had never thought of the ancients as gentlemen. Curious, that !

He looked about him at the still perfection of the scene. Westward the sun was beginning to sink towards the hills : the valley beneath him was already becoming a blur of purple shadow. Some-

where in the distance a bird piped sweetly : away towards the sun sailed a hawk on steady wing.

‘ When do you expect the redoubtable Smales ? ’ she asked suddenly. Before answering he looked at his watch.

‘ He should be here by this.’

‘ And then ? ’

‘ I don’t understand.’

‘ What are you going to do with me ? ’

The blue eyes were strangely, curiously insistent. There was a half-mocking smile on the lips.

‘ I am entirely at your service,’ he said in a scrupulously polite, yet exceedingly matter-of-fact tone. ‘ What would you like me to do ? ’

‘ Obviously I have little choice.’

‘ You have a home somewhere—friends ? ’

‘ Ah ! ’ She spread out her hands. ‘ These are hardly the clothes in which one could return to one’s friends. I might have to explain.’

‘ And you don’t wish to ? ’ he asked, looking hard at her.

‘ No ! ’

She said this so decidedly, and with such evident intent, that he could not pursue the topic.

‘ Then dare I make a suggestion ? ’

‘ It is what I have been waiting for.’

He smiled at the frankness of her reply, though

the situation still required some delicacy of handling.

‘ It was my intention to go to Guildford. Does the idea meet with your approval ? ’

‘ Perfectly. Indeed it seems to me there is no other alternative. I must get some clothes.’

‘ Yes, that seems imperative. But——’ He smiled. She saw that the smile was not wholly free of embarrassment.

‘ But you don’t quite know how you are going to explain my presence to Smales ? It ’s really quite simple. Just about here I was thrown from my bicycle, and being unable to continue the journey on foot you very kindly offered to give me a lift.’

‘ In my broken-down car ? ’

‘ Oh, of course you knew Smales was returning with another.’

‘ And your broken bicycle ? ’

‘ That was carted back to Dorking.’

‘ I see.’

He appreciated her ready invention, though it did not seem quite satisfactory as to detail. Yet he did not expect a woman to concern herself over such a trivial matter. Not having the slightest doubt as to the practicability of the plan, she looked at him with unclouded eyes.

‘ And the rest ? ’ he asked.

‘ The rest ! What rest ? ’

‘ Do I know you ?—are we related ? ’

‘ Oh, of course. I am your cousin twice removed. Do you mind ? ’

‘ I am charmed. And your name ? ’

‘ Brown— Andromeda Brown.’

‘ A delightful conjunction. But don’t you think we might concoct something less obvious ? I grant without demur that it is a solid name, and most respectable, but to me it seems to lack the imaginative quality. Smales might think you don’t look like a Brown. Moreover, he is probably aware that I have no relatives of that name.’

‘ Carey, then, or Vermont—or anything you like.’

‘ Carey is admirable. I have a maternal uncle of that name. Also, as he is an old bachelor, I am rather hopeful of him.’

‘ Are you also a bachelor ? ’

‘ Unfortunately I have never been able to induce any woman to forego her freedom for my sake.’

‘ Have you tried ? ’ She was smiling now as though in thorough enjoyment of his melancholy confession.

‘ Persistently. Those whom one wants never seem to want one, and all the rest are shadows.’

‘ To you ? ’

‘ I would not presume so greatly. Ah, what’s that ? ’

The hoarse, weird tooting of a car was heard in the distance. He looked up the hill in the direction of the sound. Presently it came again and then again, each time swiftly nearer. Then on the other side of the hill the humming was plainly heard, and quickly the car itself came in view. Smales was sitting beside the driver.

‘ Ixion ? ’ she said.

‘ Yes.’

She adjusted the goggles and drew the peak of her cap well down.

IV

THE car that had been brought to the rescue was a rakish, powerful-looking beast, which, judging from its untidy condition, seemed as though it worked too hard to be clean. Smales alighted and approached Carey Vermont.

‘ I ’m afraid I am rather late, sir,’ he began, ‘ but when I reached the garage at Guildford this car was out.’

‘ That ’s all right, Smales. Only sorry you were put to the inconvenience of such a tramp.’

Rather uncertain was the glance with which Ixion favoured his master. Consideration, couched in the politest of terms, almost invariably confused him. Nor had he yet grown accustomed to this somewhat eccentric employer. The last man for whom he had driven was a retired stockbroker with a domineering wife and a dearth of h’s, who had never for a moment allowed him to forget the distance between them. Though a good man, Smales was not without his modicum of human nature, and whereas an accident to the car had

often proved a source of secret pleasure, he now regarded such a catastrophe as little short of calamitous.

‘ I suppose she ’s strong enough to tow us ? ’ inquired Vermont.

‘ Forty h.p., ’ answered Ixion promptly : ‘ do her sixty-five easy. ’

‘ Eminently satisfactory. ’ But Smales was looking at the quaint figure in their own car, a questioning look, though entirely free of astonishment.

‘ Yes, another passenger for you, John, ’ was the explanation. ‘ Met with an accident half-way down the hill. Bicycle smashed. ’

‘ Is the gentleman hurt, sir ? ’

‘ It ’s not a gentleman, John, but a lady. Curiously enough a cousin of mine. I am going to take her on to Guildford. ’

John Smales nodded as though he understood. There was not even a suspicion of doubt in his round, brown eyes.

For the next ten minutes the two mechanics were busy affixing the tow lines, etc., Carey Vermont in the meantime explaining to Andromeda the process by which they hoped to reach their destination. Her eager eyes beamed at him through the unbecoming goggles : he noticed the curl of the sensitive red mouth, the singular whiteness of the

little teeth. He was still wondering at it all when Smales respectfully announced that they were ready to start. Vermont instantly took his seat by Andromeda, and Ixion mounted to his post by the wheel.

‘Are you ready?’ asked the man on the 40 h.p.

‘All ready,’ answered Ixion.

Slowly they mounted the summit of the hill. The sun had already sunk behind the distant tree-tops, and great, dark purple shadows were enwrapping the valleys far and near. Andromeda settled herself back on the seat and heaved a sigh of content.

‘Are you cold?’ asked Perseus.

‘Good gracious, no!’

An odd smile played round the corners of her mouth. Ridiculous fellow! Did he think she was still—— And then the smile deepened, and had he been looking into the goggles he would have seen the most amazing lights in her blue eyes. But he would have seen no shadow of shame, regret, or fear.

‘It will be dark when we reach Guildford,’ he said presently.

‘How opportunely things fall out. Darkness will hide the singularity of my costume.’

‘So it will. I never thought of that.’

‘That’s so like a man. I don’t believe men ever think.’

‘Oh, yes they do,’ he said. ‘To tell you the truth, I’ve been thinking very deeply.’

‘About what?’

‘Just exactly how we are going to manage.’

‘To manage?’

‘About that singular costume of yours. You see, you have nothing. It is a bit awkward, isn’t it?’

‘Not nearly as awkward as it might be.’

‘We had better stop at the first ladies’ shop and get you something. Then I can leave you at the hotel and hunt up diggings for myself and Ixion.’

‘Won’t he think it strange?’

‘How?’

‘You cannot very well leave your cousin in the lurch.’

‘I never thought of that.’

‘What did I tell you?’

Her low laugh rose above the humming of the wheels. He looked at her and smiled.

‘Then you don’t mind?’ he asked.

‘Not in the least. Why should I?’

‘Really there is no occasion. I have no doubt we shall adjust matters quite satisfactorily.’

‘Quite.’

The 40 h.p. was fully equal to the extra strain.

Moreover, the run into Guildford is an easy gradient, and on the levels she fairly purred with pride as she careered over the dusty road. With the setting of the sun clouds came up out of the south and west threatening rain, but this luckily held off, or blew over. The clouds, however, added a deeper darkness to the summer night, which was not without its advantage.

As they drew up before the principal hotel Carey Vermont alighted, entered the house and made inquiries. He wanted rooms for himself and his cousin, a sitting-room if they had one, also a bedroom for his chauffeur. A serious accident had happened to the car, he went on to explain. But the young lady in the office did not seem at all interested in accidents. Probably she had grown accustomed to them. She reeled off certain numbers. Would the gentleman like to inspect the rooms ?

‘ I suppose they’re your best ? ’ he asked. She assured him they were.

He went out and explained the situation to Andromeda. Then he turned to Smales.

‘ We are staying here for the night. I have arranged a room for you. Examine the car well and report to me in the morning.’

‘ Yes, sir.’

Carefully he helped Andromeda to alight and conducted her within. The barmaid, clerk, or whatever her calling, was waiting for them at the door. If she even thought, which is doubtful, that Andromeda looked a queer bundle, it seemed to occasion her no surprise. Year in, year out, some weird creatures alighted from motor cars at that house.

She led them upstairs to their sitting-room, which was on the first floor overlooking the street.

‘ You would like something to eat ? ’ she asked in automatic fashion.

‘ An excellent idea. You will serve it here ? ’

‘ That will be extra.’

‘ Naturally.’

‘ Your rooms are on the other side of the passage. Fourteen and fifteen.’

‘ Thanks. You will have the baggage brought up ? ’

‘ At once, sir.’

When she was gone Andromeda removed her goggles, but she still kept the cap on. Her first movement was towards a large gilt mirror which hung over the mantelpiece.

‘ What a sight I look ! ’

He smiled. It was the way of a woman, and after all he liked her none the less for her vanity.

‘ I will go and look at the rooms,’ he said.

He found they were *en suite*, with a communicating door. Choosing for her the better and more tastefully furnished one, he locked the door, leaving the key on her side. Then he brought her to inspect it. Surreptitiously her eye fell on the door and the key.

‘ You are very kind,’ she said.

‘ I am afraid it ’s the best that can be done.’ He looked at her, and she noticed the growing embarrassment of his glance. ‘ Perhaps that young lady will be able to help us ? ’ he suggested.

‘ But wouldn’t that look suspicious ? How do I come to be without things of my own ? And I have no money either.’

‘ Please do not let that distress you. The unfortunate thing is that all the shops seemed to be shut as we came along.’

‘ Did you notice that ? ’ she exclaimed, her eyes shining.

‘ It was the first thing I did notice. It must be early closing day.’

Again she smiled, but this time with a deeper meaning. Even his tame, commonplace conclusion could not rob her of thought.

‘ In the morning, of course,’ he continued. ‘ But to-night.’

‘To-night will pass,’ she said.

‘You’re frightfully brave, Andromeda.’

‘I need to be.’

‘Excuse me one moment,’ he said. ‘Perhaps we shall be able to do something better for you than that fur coat.’

He dashed from the room, leaving her looking after him with wondering eyes. A smile passed over her lips, her head went up, her chin stuck out showing the perfect line of throat. But she betrayed agitation of no kind whatever, and as her glance wandered curiously round the room it again fell on the door and the key. With a quick, supple movement she reached it, tested it. There was a bolt on the door, and this also had been driven home. Her eyes softened marvellously, and the mocking curl of the lip grew almost plaintive.

Quickly he returned, a somewhat gorgeous bath robe flung across his arm.

‘It’s all I have,’ he said, holding it out : ‘do you think it will do?’

‘Splendidly,’ she cried. ‘You are extremely kind.’

‘Nothing at all, I assure you. Sorry I can’t do more. Shall I say dinner in a quarter of an hour?’

‘If you will be so good.’

He left her and returned to the sitting-room where

a rusty-faced country waiter in a loose shining suit of rusty black was sloppily laying the table. From him Carey Vermont learnt certain particulars respecting certain shops. His projected visit would have to be postponed until the morning.

‘ I suppose you are quite ready, sir ? ’ said the man as he stood by the door.

‘ I will ring.’

‘ Very good, sir.’

Five minutes later Andromeda entered, and although the gown was many sizes too large for her she contrived to look wonderfully attractive in it. Her hair was dressed with surprising neatness (he wondered where she had got the hairpins, brushes, etc.), and a powder-puff of some description had been brought into requisition with artistic effect.

‘ It was the best I could do,’ she said, meeting his glance with an apologetic smile.

‘ Such ingenuity is bewildering.’

‘ Well, you see, I was really too tired to unpack.’

‘ Naturally. May I ring for the dinner ? ’

‘ If you will.’

They sat facing each other across the little table, and he noticed that when the light flickered on her head each massive coil of hair shone like a bar of red gold. The voluminous robe completely hid the clothes beneath, but when the huge sleeves fell back

from her little hands he saw the livid weals round the wrists.

‘ Yes,’ she said, holding them out, ‘ a painful reminder. But they too will fade.’

‘ Like the memory of this day ? ’

‘ Only that part of it which one wishes not to remember. These cutlets are quite delicious.’

He smiled as he raised his glass.

‘ To our better acquaintance, Andromeda.’

‘ Do you think it will be desirable ? ’

‘ I cannot doubt it.’

She shook her head. ‘ I don’t know. It all seems like a dream. Can you imagine my feelings when I was tied to that tree ? ’

‘ I think so. But why refer to it since it distresses you ? ’

‘ Because I must not permit myself to forget.’

‘ Is that wise ? ’

‘ Wise ! I often wonder where wisdom ends and foolishness begins. We all know the formulas of each, but do we follow them in practice ? ’

‘ Should we be happier if we did ? ’

‘ I think so : yes, on the whole I should say so—assuredly. One cannot have it both ways.’

He smiled at the colloquialism, but as she was apparently unconscious of it, his face quickly assumed its accustomed gravity of demeanour.

‘ Yet there are not a few, even in this world, who closely approach that ideal of perfection.’

‘ Perhaps. Have you ever hated any one ? ’ she asked suddenly.

‘ I have disliked some people intensely.’

‘ But that is not the same thing. People should either be hated or loved. To dislike them is merely to show that they are unworthy of hate or love. Indifferent people, the people whom one dislikes, should simply be ignored.’

‘ I endeavour to ignore them.’

‘ And when that cannot be—when one is forced to stronger measures ? ’

‘ Philosophy might teach us the futility of extremes.’

She smiled. ‘ When did you ever know philosophy to sway a woman’s whims ? Are you a philosopher, Perseus ? ’

‘ I have based much of my conduct on philosophy.’

Her smile deepened.

‘ This is excellent wine,’ she murmured as she balanced the glass between finger and thumb.

‘ Let me help you to some more.’

‘ No, thanks. My philosophy warns me to withstand the fascination.’

Coffee followed in due course, and with it came the cigarettes. He offered her one, which she took without demur.

‘ You are not shocked ? ’

‘ I belong to the new century,’ he said.

‘ The real Andromeda would not have smoked ? ’

‘ She lived in such a benighted age.’

‘ And she has been dead such a long time. Lucky Andromeda.’

‘ Luckier we. The earth is too green and pleasant just now not to see it.’

‘ And yet——’

‘ Precisely. But I always think it more satisfactory to know that the grass is still beneath me.’

Again the smile came back to her face.

‘ Perhaps your philosophy is not without some merit.’

‘ I should be inconceivably distressed if I thought it was not. But, to leave philosophical speculation for the moment and return to practical matters, though you look exceedingly charming in that uncouth robe, it is scarcely a costume in which you would care to be seen out of doors. What do you say : shall I go shopping for you in the morning, or would you prefer to send one of the maids ? ’

‘ Would you ? ’

‘ Of course.’

‘ To send one of the maids might arouse suspicion.’

‘ So I was thinking.’

‘ But to impose on your good-nature.’

‘ Have I not placed my services at your disposal ?
If you will permit me.’

‘ I am sure the real Perseus could not have been
so kind.’

‘ Oh, he was a foreign bounder.’

‘ Who made a bargain.’

‘ I make none.’

‘ If I had been Andromeda I should never have
forgiven him for that. It was horrid.’

‘ What can you expect from a foreigner ? ’

‘ Precisely. And you haven’t even asked me who
I am.’

‘ You do not wish to tell me ? ’

‘ I cannot. But I am very grateful. You do
believe that I appreciate your kindness ? ’

‘ It has been a pleasure, Andromeda, so please
remember that the obligation is all on my side.’

‘ Thanks so much.’ She held out her hand.
‘ Good-night, Perseus.’

‘ Good-night, Andromeda.’

He opened the door for her as she passed out.
Lying across her bed was a quaintly-patterned
sleeping-suit. A curious little smile crossed her
face as she took the thing up and examined it.
Then surreptitiously she pressed it to her lips.

V

No one but ourselves can rightly appreciate our follies. The philosophy of Carey Vermont might have warned him that he was embarking on the unusual, but the inclination to proceed was stronger than all the philosophies of the world. Had Alexander been a beautiful young woman Diogenes might have thought less of the sunshine—if the chroniclers are to be believed. One may easily be a cynic in the contemplation of another's folly, but we are never short of convincing argument in our own behalf.

Also it must be conceded this incident excited pleasantly his latent love of adventure. Who or what she was really mattered nothing : the circumstance was so entirely bewitching as to charm all doubt. Presently she would go, slip out of his life like a dream, and he might fall back for consolation on the mutability of things. Candidly the prospect held out no superlative attraction ; but one cannot hold a dream or manacle the sunshine. He would be the lonelier for her going.

The next morning he was up early and out in the street. Indeed he kicked his heels on the kerbstone while the lazy shop-boys took down the shutters. His projected adventure on unusual waters had caused him much serious cogitation : but he had made up his mind to proceed with the matter, and, with the desperate resolve of a Columbus pushing into the West, he at last entered the principal drapery establishment of the town. In the windows of this particular shop ladies' clothing, both under and over, was exposed in reckless profusion ; and one dress in particular, marked ' A Bargain—39/6,' had a magnetic attraction for him. The material, as far as he could judge, was serge, the colour irrefragably navy blue. He had once heard a lady friend say that a woman was always safe in navy blue or black, and he duly congratulated himself on the excellence of his memory. The price was so trivial that he wondered if she would feel insulted. But then this was not Bond Street, and she could hardly expect costumes at fifty guineas each.

On the whole he thought he would begin with that dress, so taking his courage in both hands he entered. Instantly he was pounced upon by a stoutish gentleman in a frock-coat, who advanced upon him, softly rubbing a pair of fat, red hands.

' Good-morning, sir,' said this gentleman : ' what

can I have the pleasure of doing for you this morning ? ’

‘ I want to buy a lady’s frock,’ he said.

‘ Yes, sir : this way.’ He led him to a dim and distant counter, behind which stood three or four girls, who all eyed him with evident interest. ‘ Miss Ellis, will you kindly attend to this gentleman.’

Miss Ellis leant over the counter and smiled encouragingly. She was a plump, merry-faced girl, with pretty brown hair and roguish eyes.

‘ What can I show you, sir ? ’ she asked demurely.

‘ You see, it’s like this,’ he began, a little unsteadily ; ‘ I—I want to surprise my wife.’

‘ Yes, sir.’

Miss Ellis looked as though perfectly aware that this surprising of a wife was a trivial commonplace.

‘ You know, it’s her birthday to-day.’ She smiled. She did not know, but there was no reason why it should not be. ‘ I rather thought of buying her that navy blue costume in the window. It’s marked thirty-nine and six.’

‘ Just arrived from Paris yesterday,’ said Miss Ellis, without turning a hair.

‘ Really ! ’

The costume was brought and duly spread upon the counter. When he saw it he started as though he had been discovered committing a theft, or some

other criminal offence. The thing consisted merely of a coat and skirt. Andromeda needed a little more than that.

‘Of course,’ he said, ‘there ought to be something under the coat?’

‘Of course, sir: but any light-coloured blouse will match it.’

‘Naturally. Now what would you suggest?’

He smiled ingratiatingly. Miss Ellis was beginning to enjoy herself. She suggested ‘something creamy.’ He thought the suggestion not inappropriate. She was rather ‘creamy’ herself.

‘By all means let it be something creamy.’

She displayed a dainty confection of lace and silk. He was delighted.

‘Forty-two and eleven,’ she said prosaically.

He smiled. It struck him as rather odd that this little piece of silk should cost more than the whole costume. But what did he know of such things?

‘Admirable,’ he exclaimed. ‘I wonder if it will fit?’

‘It’s medium size,’ said the girl.

‘The dress also is of medium size?’

‘Yes, sir.’

Yes, he thought Andromeda might be called of medium size, though perhaps a little on the tall

side. This he explained to the girl, who assured him that the dress would fit beautifully.

‘ Anyway,’ said he, ‘ it can be altered ? ’

‘ Oh yes, sir. We guarantee a perfect fit.’

‘ By George,’ he exclaimed, ‘ that ’s ripping. I ’m awfully obliged to you.’

‘ Don’t mention it, sir. Is there anything else I can show you ? ’

‘ Ah, I wonder if you would ! ’

She smiled. It had been extremely difficult to keep a serious face, but she had performed her onerous duty with commendable fortitude.

‘ I suppose you keep the—the things that go under that ? ’ he began diffidently.

‘ Oh yes, sir.’

‘ Petticoats and—other things ? ’

‘ We stock everything that is necessary.’

‘ By George, that ’s awfully lucky. Just make me up a bundle of ’em.’

Miss Ellis dashed away as though she had been shot. Her face had been growing redder and redder, and as she slipped round the nearest corner she nearly exploded with laughter. Carey Vermont raised his hat and wiped his fevered brow. But he felt proud of himself. He had faced the situation like a hero.

When she returned her face was still extremely

flushed, while her eyes looked as though she had been crying. On her arm she carried a bundle of silk petticoats, striped, plain, gaudy, and the like. Touching what he thought looked the prettiest he said, 'That will do.'

'And the next article?'

It was with quivering lips she put the question. It looked as though she again suffered the dread of a violent explosion, and once or twice she sought relief in the subterfuge of searching for something on the shelves behind her.

'Look here,' he said confidentially, 'while I'm at it I think I may as well present her with an entire outfit. Just put me up one of everything.'

'One of everything, sir?'

'You know—from stockings upwards.'

He was growing hotter and hotter: the girl bit her lips in the vain endeavour to keep back the severest fit of giggling that she had ever experienced. With a hurried movement she reached the sheltering corner once again, where she sobbed and sighed with the very joy of the thing.

'What's the matter with you?' asked one of the assistants, coming up.

'Oh, I shall die,' she moaned, 'I know I shall die. That man's simply killing me.'

'If you don't feel capable of completing the

order——’ began the other, who rather regretted that she had not been given the task.

‘ Oh, I wouldn’t miss it for the world ! ’

What made her do it Carey Vermont never could understand. He supposed it was her stupidity. Naturally a shop-girl, instinctively feminine though she may be, would of a surety lack something of that delicacy which he liked to associate with women. But this merry-faced creature exposed the various articles with the most unblushing effrontery, even going so far as to draw his attention to the quality of the lace at the neck of the chemise, and at the extremities of that other important article of feminine apparel.

‘ Excellent,’ he muttered, ‘ admirable—just the thing. Hope she ’ll like ’em. Jolly fine—very pretty—just the thing.’ And he repeated ‘ Just the thing,’ at least half-a-dozen times.

Poor man, he had never been subjected to such an ordeal, and for once in a way that laughing philosophy, of which at times he had been singularly proud, entirely forsook him. Though the humour of the situation was by no means lost on him, he felt utterly incapable of taking full advantage of it. This buying an outfit for the wife was really a most tremendous business.

‘ Is that all I can do for you, sir ? ’ asked the girl demurely.

‘ Yes, thank you. I think that is all.’

‘ We have just had a new consignment of corsets from Paris.’

‘ Oh, by George, I ’d forgotten the corsets ! ’

She showed him some pretty ones with pale blue suspenders attached. Pale blue—of course ! It would match the other decorations.

Naturally he chose the prettiest. She admired his taste, and showed her appreciation by an approving glance.

‘ You ’ve been awfully good to me,’ he said ; ‘ I don’t know what I should have done without you. Do you admire these things ? ’

‘ I think they ’re frightfully sweet.’

‘ Then have a pair—as a souvenir.’

‘ Oh, sir ! ’

‘ No offence, I assure you. Have some handkerchiefs then—or some stockings. Confound it all, I ’ve forgotten the stockings ! I ’m afraid I ’m giving you an unconscionable amount of trouble.’

‘ It ’s a pleasure, sir,’ she said.

Looking closer, he saw that she had a particularly fresh, sweet face, and a beautifully rounded bust. Speaking eyes, too ! And then he thought of other eyes, blue eyes with dark, straight brows. After

all, one woman at a time was quite enough for any sensible man.

She showed him stockings innumerable, silk, Lisle thread, cashmere — open worked, clocked — of which he made a varied selection.

‘ What do you usually affect ? ’ he asked.

She blushed very becomingly, yet succeeded in replying with some promptitude, ‘ Cashmere.’

‘ Then take half-a-dozen pairs for yourself,’ he said ; ‘ and don’t forget the corset. You’ve been jolly good to me. I don’t know what I should have done without you.’

‘ Thank you, sir, I’m sure,’ and again she blushed so prettily that he felt like giving her a pair of gloves, or something more useful. ‘ Where shall I forward the things ? ’ she asked.

‘ Well, you see, I rather want to take them with me. I suppose you can let me have a man to carry them round to the hotel ? ’

‘ Oh yes, sir, certainly.’

She called to the shopwalker and explained the situation, and a few minutes later Carey Vermont and the porter left the establishment laden with boxes. He had the things brought direct to his room, dismissed the man, who could not find words to express his gratitude at such magnanimity, and then knocked at the communicating door.

‘ Andromeda ! ’

‘ Well ? ’

‘ How did you sleep ? ’

‘ Splendidly.’

‘ I ’ve been shopping.’

‘ So early ! You are energetic.’

‘ The things are piled against the door. Do you think you can be ready for breakfast in an hour’s time ?—or would you rather have it sent up ? ’

‘ Oh, I can be quite ready, if——’

‘ I think you ’ll find everything complete.’

‘ Thanks awfully.’

‘ Well then, in an hour ? ’

‘ In an hour.’

He went below and ordered the breakfast. Almost immediately he was joined by Smales.

‘ Well, John ? ’

‘ Perhaps you would like to come round to the garage, sir.’

Having nothing better to do, he consented. He stood by, attempting to look wise, while the experts talked. As a matter of fact the original trouble had been located from the first ; but, as is the way of motor men, they discussed every conceivable ill that the car is heir to.

‘ It means sending to London for a new wheel,’ said Smales. ‘ There ’s nothing else for it.’

‘ That spells delay ? ’

‘ Perhaps two days, sir. But of course I can stay here and bring her over to Aldershot.’

‘ Quite so. But I dislike intensely having to take train. It makes one look—well, doesn’t it, now ? ’

‘ Rather, sir.’

‘ On the other hand, even if we telegraph, the makers are not likely to hurry themselves in despatching the goods.’

‘ No, sir, they’re not likely to break their neck over it.’

‘ I feared not. Besides, they might make a mistake and send the wrong article.’

‘ They might, sir ; though that ’s not very likely.’

‘ Still, one never knows what these manufacturers will do. Now, to obviate any risk of that kind, I think you had better go up to London, select the wheel, and bring it down yourself. That will undoubtedly save time, and prevent all likelihood of mishap.’

‘ Yes, sir.’

And so it was decided that Smales should make the journey to London. He knew it was not necessary, but the governor, quite unlike his usual imperturbable self, seemed anxious about the matter. John had never known him so fearful of possible mishap, so curiously excited over proble-

mathematical dangers. In the ordinary way he would have made a mock of such petty annoyances. That was the one good thing about the governor,—he did take troubles lightly. No stamping by the wayside and cursing delay. Burst tyre, bad ignition, choked exhaust,—these were all in the day's march, and counted nothing in the end. Give him a philosopher every time, one who looked disaster in the face and smiled. But when the placid flow of that philosophic calm grew ruffled, the round, honest eyes of Ixion grew rounder, fuller, deeper—with a suspicion of intellectual potentiality.

All the same, he went to London.

VI

It was considerably after the stipulated hour, but knowing something of woman and her ways he was not surprised at the unpunctuality. Many and many a time he had been kept kicking his heels while the particular she of the moment adjusted that last hairpin, or studiously scrutinised the final poise of the hat. Thus it had been and thus it would ever be. This was her day, and he could not blame her for making the most of it. The young ones were coming along—they were always coming along. That was the inevitable destiny. Plump cheeks, bright eyes, firm lips ; young bodies aglow with the Maytime ! Yes, yes, the young were always coming along. But in the meantime he was infernally peckish,—and the kidneys were probably going cold !

She entered with hand extended and the most charming apology on her lips. He took the hand, muttering he scarce knew what. Amazement was his, yet he knew he should not be amazed. Was she more beautiful than he had imagined ? Yet

how could that be? But of a truth he was unprepared for such a vision, and seeing the wonder in his eyes she laughed lightly.

‘ You showed the most admirable taste and judgment, Perseus. The things fit perfectly.’

‘ You look charming,’ he muttered.

‘ No compliments, please,’ she laughed. ‘ But it really was most kind and thoughtful of you. Have I kept you waiting long for breakfast ? ’

‘ Not at all,’ he answered her. Breakfast ! He would not have cared if the kidneys had been placed on ice !

‘ Still I know I have been a long time. May I ring ? ’

‘ Allow me.’

He rushed to the bell : she crossed over to the window and looked out into the street. His eyes followed her. If she looked so well in that plain blue serge skirt, what would she be like in a costume worthy of her ?

‘ What a lovely morning ! ’ she said.

He was conscious that the morning had suddenly grown lovelier. Conscious also was he of returning some commonplace remark : more conscious still that the sudden appearance of the breakfast saved the situation.

‘ Coffee or tea ? ’ she asked as she seated herself beside the cups and saucers.

‘Coffee,’ he said.

‘One lump—or two?’

‘Three, please.’

‘You have a sweet tooth, Perseus.’

‘Remarkably.’

It was delightful to see her sitting there so complacently, with an air of such self-possession. And how cool and sweet and refreshing she looked. Miss Ellis of the roguish eyes was perfectly correct in her estimation of the potentialities of that creamy blouse. Her hair was faultlessly dressed: the huge coils of it were like rolls of polished gold. Last night he had thought her complexion somewhat pallid; there were dark shadings under the eyes. But the morning light showed no trace of pallid skin, of mystic shadows. Perhaps she was still a trifle pale, but now and again, as his eyes met hers, a delicate flush lent a dazzling lustre to her face.

‘Isn’t it strange?’ she said.

‘What?’

‘That I should be here at breakfast with you; and yesterday, at this time, we were ignorant of each other’s existence.’

‘I wonder?’

‘Of course we were.’

‘It is delightful,’ he said.

She smiled. 'Let me give you some more coffee.'

'Thanks.'

'Do you know,' said she, handing him the cup, and looking at him with serious eyes, 'I don't think it's fair to you.'

'And if I think it is?'

'But look at the trouble I'm putting you to—and the expense.'

'In return for which you condescend—to pour out my coffee. The obligation is all on my side.'

'But you have been very good,' she insisted with a shake of the head. 'I hope you believe that I appreciate your kindness.'

'I implore you not to mention it. Could I do less? It is a source of infinite satisfaction to me that I should have been of some little service to you. My only regret is that it was necessary. Won't you try one of those eggs? I have been duly assured of their probity.'

'You see, you don't know who I am, or how I came to be in that position.'

'Curiosity, I assure you, is not one of my predominant vices.'

'Yet you would like to know?'

'Only when you feel at liberty to tell me.'

'That I cannot do. But what if I am not worthy of this consideration?'

‘ I prefer to think you unfortunate. It was not the fault of Andromeda that she was exposed to such a fate.’

‘ And you still choose to think of me as Andromeda ? ’

‘ As Andromeda I shall always think of you.’

She cracked the top of an egg and began slowly to remove the broken shell. He occupied himself with a similar task.

‘ I believe their certificate of good character was perfectly honest,’ he said. The silence was a little irksome : he was not yet quite sure of the way.

‘ What has become of Ixion ? ’ she asked suddenly.

‘ He has gone to town to purchase the new wheel—and explain things,’ he added as an afterthought, a curious, questioning look in her eye causing this addition.

‘ And he is returning ? ’

‘ Sometime to-day, I suppose.’

‘ And the car will be mended ?——’

‘ Probably sometime to-morrow. Why ? ’

‘ I was only thinking.’

‘ Of what ? ’

‘ Of what will happen to me when you are gone.’

‘ But I ’m not going to leave you here. You must allow me to send you back to your people.’

She paused in conveying a spoonful of egg to her mouth : slowly the spoon dropped back to her plate. She rested her elbows on the table and turned on him a peculiarly penetrating glance.

‘ What if I don’t wish to go back ? ’

‘ Oh, but of course——’ he began lightly. She cut him short.

‘ What if I—can’t go back ? What if there is nowhere for me to go ? ’

‘ But you must have a home—friends ? ’

‘ And if I have neither ? ’

‘ No one is so badly off as that.’

‘ No one but me. You are sorry now that the gods directed you to my rescue ? ’ The touch of bitterness in her tone did not escape him ; but he thought he understood it.

‘ On the contrary, I have the greater reason for congratulation.’

She looked at him searchingly, as if weighing all the possibilities of that reply.

‘ Well, perhaps it is not quite so bad as that, though it’s bad enough. Yet, frankly, I have not the remotest intention of returning. If you were a woman would you return to the man who treated you as I have been treated ? ’

‘ No ! ’

The answer was decided enough : yet in it there

was a lingering tone of speculation which did not escape her.

‘There is a possibility of my having merited the punishment—is not that what you are thinking?’

‘No crime could merit such an outrage,’ he answered quickly.

He knew the answer was cold, unheroic: he knew that she was summing him up, and he was conscious of appearing to no great advantage. Yet this situation, so strange at its inception, seemed every moment to be growing more involved.

‘Why should I hide the truth from you?’ she asked suddenly. ‘If there is any one in the world who has the right to demand my confidence it is you.’

‘I implore you not to think of such a thing. I have no right to your confidence, nor do I lay any claim to it. That you have allowed me to assist you is sufficient honour, sufficient reward.’

‘And you are not curious?’

‘I am human, Andromeda.’

‘I should not like you so well if you were not.’

He bowed gracefully. Perhaps it was also the human in her which appealed so strongly to him.

‘But please do not let my curiosity betray you into that which you might regret. And once more I beg of you to permit me to repeat that, whilst

regretting the necessity, I am delighted to be of service to you.'

'That sounds very formal and proper,' she said, 'and I have no doubt it is quite correct. But when I am gone—you will wonder?'

'I admit it.'

'And you will think of me as——'

'One who has been abominably treated.'

'Is that all?'

'It is not even a part.'

Her face grew serious: wistful grew the blue eyes: the mouth showed a pathetic little whimper.

'I wonder what you really think of me? Yet it is not fair to judge, is it? I have not had a chance of meeting you on equal terms.'

He thought the terms of their meeting were all in her favour, though it is probable she would not have seen it in that light. Women have the most amazing ideas of equity.

'Where were you going when you met me?' she asked suddenly.

'To Aldershot.'

'You are a soldier?'

'No. I was merely going to put up with a friend for the night.'

'And then?'

'Wherever fate, or Ixion, drove.'

‘ You mean ? ’

‘ Exactly what I say. At present my only object is to enjoy the sunshine.’

For a minute she seemed to think seriously : then she smiled at him in a tentative, nervous fashion.

‘ You make it very hard for me,’ she said in a low voice.

‘ I hope not,’ he replied : ‘ such was not my intention. Tell me, how do I offend ? ’

‘ If I were a man,’ she began. ‘ But we are not even friends ? ’

‘ I had hoped so. But if you were a man ? ’ he insisted. She hung her head. ‘ Andromeda, tell me plainly ; you will not go back to your people ? ’

‘ Nothing would induce me.’

‘ Then when you leave me ? ’

She shrugged her shoulders. ‘ What does it matter ? The Lord will provide,’ she added bitterly.

‘ But let me understand clearly, distinctly.’

‘ What is there to understand ? I shall not go back to them, and I have nowhere else to go.’

Their eyes met across the table : there was a gleam of intelligence in hers which found its way to his brain.

‘ It would be rather fun,’ he said—‘ if you wouldn’t mind.’

‘What would be fun?’

‘I didn’t quite mean that; but—look here,’ he said suddenly, ‘why shouldn’t you stay with me?’

‘That would be delightful,’ she admitted. ‘But the terms?’

‘There are no terms—except those of friendship. I shall be running about the country for at least a month.’

‘And then?’

‘Who shall say what will happen? Ixion may have killed us both before then.’

‘Or we may wish he had. The suggestion is impracticable, Perseus.’

‘Why should it be?’

‘How can a man and a woman be friends?’

‘Oh, that is an exploded idea. I think we could be good friends. I will promise, if you insist.’

‘No,’ she answered gravely, ‘please don’t start promising. That would mean certain failure. But what would you think of me if I consented?’

‘I should think it infinitely delightful of you.’

‘I should be a tremendous expense. You see, I have positively nothing.’

‘We could buy things.’

‘But there are a hundred and one reasons——’

‘Why you should consent, and only one why you should not.’

‘ But that is a big one.’

‘ Yes ; but not so big as it might appear to some. You are determined not to return to your people ? ’

‘ Determined.’

‘ And you have nowhere to go ? ’

‘ Nowhere.’

‘ Then who loses ? ’

‘ Not you, Perseus. The thing’s unheard of.’

‘ My dear Andromeda, if you have no faith in me, the proposition lapses. Still let me be of service. Command me in any and every particular. I confess the thought suggested a new interest in life for me ; nor can I see why we shouldn’t be just the best of pals.’

‘ That would be nice,’ she admitted ; ‘ just pals. Pity it isn’t practicable.’

‘ It is perfectly practicable if we like to make it so. Of necessity you must doubt, and I am quite sensible of your point of view. Of course you don’t know me, and I can assure you I have no intention of cataloguing my virtues : the effort would prove too exhausting. Yet I rather wish you would give me a trial.’

‘ You would simply think of me as a man friend whom you were taking for a jaunt in your car ? ’

‘ I cannot guarantee that,’ and he smiled into her

questioning eyes ; ' but I can guarantee that I will treat you as a man friend. Consider, you are already my cousin.'

' The relationship is not near enough.'

' Then let it be a sister.'

' That is a little too near for safety. No, on the whole I like the idea of the pal best. It will be a change to be pals with somebody. But I oughtn't to, Perseus.'

Appealingly she looked at him. Wistfully pathetic were those strange blue eyes, and with that look a whole revulsion of feeling swept through him. He suddenly grew extraordinarily good : there was no virtue in or under heaven just then with which he was not in complete rapport. All that was noblest in him welled up like a fountain ; a thousand noble but inarticulate vows played round him like a halo. Why shouldn't a man and a woman be good pals and nothing more ? He would show her. At that moment he believed himself capable of rising to the supremest heights of magnanimous renunciation.

' Where should we go ? ' she asked.

' Wherever you wish, or the fancy takes us.'

' Are you rich, Perseus ? '

' No,' he laughed, ' not rich ; but I shall be able to complete the tour without pawning the car.'

‘ I didn’t ask from any sordid motives.’

‘ I am sure you didn’t. But I beg of you not to let that consideration distress you. We shall do very well.’

‘ What will Ixion say ? ’

‘ The more you know of Ixion the less you will fear him. He is a most excellent fellow, discreet beyond words, and singularly devoted to me.’

All the same he pictured a widening of Smales’s round eyes.

‘ After all, I am your cousin, and there ’s no harm in it, is there, Perseus ? ’

‘ My dear Andromeda, there is no denying that it is a little singular, though this whole adventure teems with singularity. Yet to my thinking that, instead of being a drawback, will constitute its peculiar charm. Undoubtedly we are placed in an unusual situation—I think no other man and woman in the world can be situated as we are just at present—but by a strict observance of convention I see no earthly reason why we should not render it exceedingly commonplace.’

A faint smile played round her lips. She seemed rather to enjoy his faint tinge of cynicism.

‘ If it wasn’t for Ixion,’ she said.

And thus was the victory. If honest John Smales was the insuperable bar, there was nothing much to

be feared. Honest John with his round, brown eyes and his squat, smug face.

‘ I wonder why people of the name of John are always called “ honest ” ? ’ he asked, unconsciously voicing his thoughts.

‘ I don’t know,’ she said. ‘ Perhaps they can’t help it.’

VII

It was an extremely delicate matter, and for the life of him he scarcely knew how to approach it. This agreement of comradeship was admirable in theory, but in practice he feared it would leave much to be desired. However, she gave him the necessary opportunity by expressing admiration for the new cream blouse. They had finished breakfast by this time, and he, having received permission, was smoking a cigarette.

‘Glad you like it,’ he said. ‘I was in an awful funk.’

‘Why?’

‘Suppose it had been something you didn’t like—something bright yellow or emerald green, for instance?’

‘But it wasn’t, you see.’

‘Of course, even a man is sometimes possessed with an idea of the fitness of things. I did my best, Andromeda.’

‘And an admirable best,’ she admitted.

‘Thanks: awfully nice of you to say so. Naturally a man can’t think of everything.’

‘ But that ’s just what you have done—in the most wonderful manner. Are you married, Perseus ? ’

‘ Good Lord, no ! ’

‘ Never been ? ’

‘ Never ! ’

‘ Then how do you know so much about women’s clothes ? ’

‘ Seen ’em in the shop windows, I suppose. They don’t hide anything nowadays.’

‘ Almost as bad as the women ? ’

‘ My dear Andromeda, I have never seen anything bad in a woman.’

‘ Ah,’ she laughed, ‘ it is easily seen that you have not been married.’

‘ I can see now how greatly unfortunate I have been. But in this matter of purchase I really did my best—with the aid of a very charming young lady.’

‘ Ah ! and how did you explain ? ’

‘ I said it was my wife’s birthday—I hope you don’t mind ?—and that I meant to surprise her with an outfit as a present. The girl was most obliging : suggested all kinds of things. But, of course, some items must have been overlooked in the hurry. Now I want you to let me remedy the omission in the only possible way I can : and that is, my dear Andromeda, by allowing you to make your own purchases.’

As he spoke he took out his pocket-book. With a quick movement of the hand she begged him to desist.

‘Don’t, or you will spoil everything!’

‘But——’

‘I know. It is very good of you, Perseus. But I should like you to buy everything.’

‘Everything?’

‘Yes. You can’t say you don’t know how.’

‘But if you only knew the supreme effort!’

‘Your taste is perfect. I should not have been half so successful.’

‘But, hang it all, I forgot the nighties!’

‘Your pyjamas were most comfortable.’

‘Still,’ he insisted, ‘you must permit me, Andromeda. I admit that, hero as I am, I shrink from a second encounter with Miss Ellis. Bid me march up to the cannon’s mouth if you like, but don’t ask me to face the mocking battery of her eyes.’

‘But Perseus was not afraid of the Gorgons. Why should you fear this Medusa of the counter?’

‘For a reason entirely opposite to that which inspired the strategy of Perseus. I fear she would not turn me into stone.’

‘Why should you fear?’ she asked, lowering her lids.

‘I rather think that after Perseus saw Andromeda he might have wished to live.’

But he got his own way in the end, a fate which almost invariably befalls the persistent male. Woman protests with some volubility. By the gods in the air and the devils beneath the sea, nothing shall move her. Loosen her hold on the situation, let go the master grip—a thousand times, no ! And yet, for the majority of us, it is so much sweeter to be led than to lead.

They went out into the street which was flooded with sunshine, and he felt in full the delights of summer and the novelty of the situation. Together they wandered aimlessly from shop to shop, criticising the goods and the passers-by. Everything that she admired he wanted her to buy, and had she been a woman of extravagant tastes his pocket-book might have suffered heavily. But she would have nothing to do with superfluities : the only purchases she made were those which she declared to be absolutely necessary.

After lunch they took a fly and drove. Summer was everywhere, in garden, field, and hedgerow ; it wrapped them about as with a warm, sweet mantle ; it sang in the air, in their blood : shone brightly in their eyes. They had tea in the old-fashioned garden of an inn just off the Godalming Road. At the foot of this garden a wee stream flowed softly over pebble, through sedge. The landlady herself

waited on them, a stout and cheery body, who eyed them with merry brown eyes. She dilated on the quietness of Guildford and its environs, and mysteriously assured them that lots of couples came that way in the summer.

The table itself was spread beneath a large mulberry-tree, the leaves of which afforded a cool and grateful shade. The branches hung heavy with the gorgeous fruit. Also the bread and butter was delicious, the cress cool and crisp. Likewise the landlady insisted on exploiting some of her home-made cake. But, like her, this was stodgy. They expressed a high opinion of its undoubted merits, but forbore to sample it. The good wife had a fat hand, and a heavy.

Andromeda was brimming over with merriment. A delicious colour was in her cheeks : her eyes were clear and glistening as the sun itself. Even the white, heavy lids seemed to have lost much of their languor, except when, catching his eye, they dropped over the light beneath.

‘What fun,’ she said. ‘The old lady thinks we are on our honeymoon.’

‘No such luck,’ he muttered. Her heavy brows contracted.

‘Really,’ she protested, ‘you will spoil everything if you talk like that. Besides, it expressly con-

travenes our bargain. You wouldn't say that to a man friend ? '

' No.'

' Then please do not forget that for the time being I am a man friend.'

' I 'm so sorry.'

' You 're really very stupid, Perseus. Why, even now you are looking at me as if I were not a man friend. It 's too ridiculous of you.'

' Mere imagination, my dear Andromeda,' he replied ; ' though, of course, you 're something more than a mere friend. You 're an uncle at least.'

' Now you 're getting more ridiculous than ever. Have some cress.'

' Thanks. I wonder if that old lady is watching us from some secret outlook. If she is, how horribly disappointed she must be.'

' Why ? '

' At not seeing us kiss each other. I believe people on their honeymoon kiss—if they never do it afterwards. We sit at the extremities of the table.'

' How do men usually sit ? '

' Of course. Only she has no idea you 're a man.'

' I can see what it is, my dear Perseus ; you 're going to make this arrangement simply unworkable.'

' I swear you misjudge me. It 's just the humour

of the animal, and the singularity of the situation. Even you will admit that it offers scope for a little badinage.'

'Indeed I admit nothing of the kind ; and if that's the way you're going to look at it——'

'Oh, but I'm only going to look at it in one way,' he interrupted hastily, 'and that way is yours. Do, please, take up that slice of bread and butter. If the old lady is watching she will think for certain that we are husband and wife.'

'Why?'

'If we were lovers we should not be quarrelling in such a peaceful haven as this.'

'Yes, it is nice here,' she admitted frankly, like one who is pleased to make the admission. 'Why can't it always be summer?'

'I suppose a wise providence foresaw the terror of monotony. If it were always summer we should sigh for a cloudy sky, a frosty morning, an exhilarating north-easter.'

'I don't think I ever should. This is peace, Perseus.'

She dropped her chin in her hand and looked across at him with dreamy eyes, eyes which seemed to pass through him, over him—eyes which rested somewhere in the immensity of the infinite.

'You want peace?'

‘ Oh, so much ! ’

Peace in a world of stress—peace for her whom fortune had tricked so cruelly. What of it had she known?—how much of peace had been hers? Or might her life be epitomised in the adventure on the hill? How had it come about? Who was the monster that had thus maltreated her?

The drowsy hum of insects filled the air. He watched the evolutions of a wasp as it circled round the sugar-bowl. A dozen times he thought the gorgeous creature would alight, but some timidity kept it eternally on the wing. The smaller insects had infinitely more courage. Where the knife had sheered through the home-made cake it had cut a currant in half. A domestic fly was now tearing at the heart of it—a ravenous little monster void of all fear. Somewhere in the trees yonder a bird was piping : even the whirl of an unseen motor broke the strange stillness not unpleasantly. For a moment he feared the people of the car might come and disturb their tranquillity. But fortunately it whirred onward—the singing meteor of the road. Motorists, as a rule, do not patronise the quiet by-ways. The green country is but so much green waste that hides from their view the nearest town.

Her eyes were closed now, but her chin still rested in the palm of her hand—a pretty hand with the

blue veins showing faintly on the inside of the wrist. Below that again was the faint discoloration, the mere sight of which made him anticipate with pleasure the doing of evil deeds. Languidly, heavily, lay the white lids across the eyes : such sweet eyes, such wonderful lids ! Who could have committed such an outrage ? What could have possessed him ? How had she merited such cruel punishment ? Of course she had not merited it. The man was a ferocious monster, a madman, to think no worse evil of him. Yet he wondered what the secret could be, and when she would enlighten his darkness.

Suddenly she opened her eyes, but though caught in the act he only smiled at the discovery.

‘ A penny for your thoughts.’

‘ You ’re too generous, Andromeda. They have never yet brought so much in the markets of the world. You would be making a bad bargain.’

‘ Not the first,’ she muttered. ‘ You were thinking about me ? ’

‘ True. Personally I fail to see how, at present, I could do anything else.’

‘ But that will spoil all,’ she asserted. ‘ Just now the look in your eyes was one almost of reproach. I couldn’t stand that, Perseus. It would make me think too deeply ; and shall I confess, I don’t want

to think at all. You will make me feel that I must explain things, and that would rob the situation of all its charm. Somehow I thought that you approached this matter as a man of imagination, that you would understand it as I understand it. We are not a modern Jack and Mabel, but two strenuous pagans wandering in a bygone age through an ancient land. Destroy that illusion and we at once descend to the convention of the commonplace. Do you understand me ? ’

‘ Partly ; but continue.’

He understood her well enough, but he loved to hear her talk. For with her talking his wonder deepened. This was a woman of imagination, a woman born out of her country, out of her century. More and more it seemed but natural that they should have met so strangely : indeed it seemed impossible that they could have met any other way. And he had prided himself that he was a modern of the moderns, knowing all the time that he was nothing of the kind.

‘ Continue, Andromeda,’ he repeated softly. ‘ When you speak I leave the centuries behind me, and range once more the shores of Ethiopia fresh from my conquest of the Gorgons.’

She lifted her eyes to his and smiled.

‘ That is the true spirit of our compact. The

spirit of summer is abroad, Perseus, and all the world is singing with the madness of it.'

'I hear it,' he said, 'the multitudinous harmonies of it. We too are of the summer, and our hearts are singing with joy. Well?'

He looked at her with quaintly serious eyes, eyes which were not yet so serious as to hide a faint glimmer of humour. She sighed.

'You remember all the time that this is the twentieth century, and that you live in London. Why do people live in London?'

'For the same reason, I suppose, that they once lived in ancient Greece: because they can't help themselves. Frightfully commonplace, isn't it; but I suppose if the truth were known the real Perseus was quite a commonplace young man, a kind of inflated Greek bounder. We know that he possessed to a remarkable degree the soul of a huckster.'

'There you have a decided advantage over him,' she admitted frankly. 'He must have been a poor sort of a hero after all.'

'To tell you the truth,' he answered, 'I was never greatly impressed by the heroism of the ancients. There was always some supernatural deity watching over them, ready to shield them when in danger, or destroy their valiant opponents. I always thought

it rather hard on the opponent. Any cockney cab-driver might be as valiant as Achilles if he knew he was invulnerable except in the heel. Hector never had the ghost of a chance. Why he was such a fool as to take on the job I never could understand.'

'You grow grossly materialistic, my dear Perseus.'

'After all, I am a child of my day, and I thank God for it. Summer is with us, Andromeda. Can't you hear it singing in the trees?'

Very still was the world at that moment. Not a sound reached them of aught but inarticulate life. But overhead the leaves were rustling faintly, and from the old-world garden there came to them the faint odour of roses. He rose, plucked some of the gorgeous fruit, and laughed to see her stain her lips.

'I think there must be something of the gipsy in you,' she said, a strange, wondering look in her eyes.

'Does the gipsy know anything of this'—he extended both hands as though to embrace the whole countryside—'beyond the fact that the sun is shining, and that the nights are warm? I doubt it. Like all heroes of romance the dirty rascal has been idealised too greatly. My materialistic mind does not allow me to idealise dirt in saint or sinner. It's good to be clean, Andromeda.'

'To be clean,' she echoed.

This, too, might mean many things. He looked at her sharply, realising something of the thought that was passing through her mind.

‘Beauty is clean,’ he said, ‘and truth is clean. She bathes in the dews of the morning, and dries her body with a mesh of sunbeams.’

‘I think,’ answered the girl, ‘that you are better even than I thought.’

Her eager eyes were still frankly searching his : the breath came through the parted lips in soft, long-drawn sighs.

‘And so you thought me good? Well, that’s something.’ There was a whimsical look in his eyes that brought a faint smile to her lips. ‘Yet I have often thought that I might be—by fits and starts.’

‘I wonder if it would be nice to be very good?’ she asked. ‘To think no evil, to do none. Is it possible? To be as good as we can be: is that enough? Some of us, it is true, could not be very good no matter how we tried. What then?’

‘Shall the comparatively good be accepted? Perhaps. Yet what act, sentiment, performance ever satisfied all? Isn’t it, after all, a mental attitude? That, too, is good in its way which has been called evil. Evil, be thou my good? Does not the converse hold equally well? An endless definition.

Madness lies by the way of the inverted proposition. That which we call happiness is surely happiness to us ? That it dies and is succeeded by a less pleasing sensation matters nothing. All things die—even the gods.' He stopped and looked at her, but the whimsical smile had deepened in his eyes. 'I am talking like a fool, Andromeda.'

'No,' she said. 'Please continue.'

Her eyes caught no gleam of his whimsicality : even her red mouth, which to him seemed for ever faintly mocking at destiny, had straightened out its curl of disdain.

'To what end ? The world has had many thousands of years now to possess its soul of virtue, and what has it made of it ? Thousands of years hence shall it be the same ? The gods are still frankly immoral. The old faiths die, the new ones grow old. Save man and woman all things change. Andromeda, there is a depth beyond which we may not go. But the earth is still green, and the sun still warm. Thank God for life. Amen.'

He was still smiling at her across the table, but much of the whimsicality had died out of his eyes.

'No one ever talked to me like this before.'

'You 've been lucky,' he said.

VIII

RETURNING to the hotel he found a telegram from Smales awaiting him. There was likely to be some delay in procuring the wheel. The manufacturers would have to send to the works. Should he wait? By all means, he replied. Never had he so little use for the worthy Ixion: never was he in less hurry to complete repairs.

'Smales telegraphs that there is likely to be some delay,' he explained to Andromeda.

'Do you mind?' she asked.

He laughed. 'Not in the least. I was wondering if the place was likely to bore you.'

'It will not bore me,' was her emphatic reply—'at least not yet,' she added with a sly look. 'To be quite frank with you, I feel rather relieved. I was afraid he might come down this evening, and that we should be hurried away.'

'And don't you want to go?'

'Why should I? I am a wanderer without an objective. Of course, it really matters little where I go or what becomes of me,' she added reflectively.

‘ Yet I am human enough to prefer a choice of evils. You do not regret ? ’

‘ Andromeda, I am the mildest man on earth ; but if you even suggest such a thing again I shall get furiously angry.’

‘ Forgive me,’ she pleaded. ‘ But, Perseus, I want you to understand one thing plainly. I realise perfectly that you are under no obligation to help me. It is possible that you may soon regret this strange, one-sided bargain, and when you do, I want you frankly to tell me.’

‘ So you insist upon seeing me in a fury ? ’

‘ Promise, Perseus—I want you to promise.’

‘ Very well : I promise. When I am tired of this one-sided bargain I will let you know. And you ? ’

‘ Why, what do you mean ? ’

‘ When you are tired ? ’

‘ I am essentially selfish, my dear Perseus. There is no fear of me.’

‘ I cannot hold you.’

‘ Perhaps you will not wish to. Besides, how does a man hold a man ? ’

‘ How does he hold a woman is more to the point.’

‘ He usually finds a way. Still, there ’s no reason why we shouldn’t be good pals, is there ? ’

‘ None whatever.’

He laughed softly to himself. Why for ever

should he be confusing their relationship, or her agreed sex? Amusing also to hear her define the situation so emphatically. No doubt he would grow accustomed to it, but at present it was decidedly suggestive of the unconventional.

Though it was like a honeymoon without the honey, he nevertheless felt it an imperative duty that she should not be bored. The hotel itself was dull as the grave: they were not as those who are sunk to the neck in the slough of matrimony. Life had still the vigour of sunrise. To see her yawn would cover him with shame unspeakable. Personally he rather favoured a stroll after dinner: but moonlight walks in the country are dangerous. He had noticed playbills about the town which announced the wonders of a lurid melodrama. The piece was called 'The Girl who Walked the Pavement of Good Intentions.' A clumsy title, but perhaps significant. Whether that pavement was in Hell or Piccadilly he did not know. It mattered little: they were probably nearly related—a kind of first cousin. Certainly the title suggested some perilous adventures, a suggestion fully borne out by the lurid posters with which every hoarding was somewhat ostentatiously plastered.

Andromeda rose to the bait like a greedy trout. Of all things she loved the theatre best, nor did she

approach the performance in that cynical or critical mood which your blasé dweller of the city is apt to assume. With the playhouse as an exalted medium of education she had no sympathy. Regarding it frankly as a source of entertainment, she was lenient to its crudities, nor visited with too severe a censure the banalities which forced a laugh from the groundlings. To be sure the villain was ferociously funny, but in a way not one whit funnier than the hero, who seemed to be a compound of heroic bombast and infantile drivel. As for the 'Girl who Walked the Pavement,' etc., she fell far short of expectations; nor could either of them tell what that Pavement exactly was, or in what locality it was situated. The truth is the Girl had not the courage of her convictions, and Andromeda was inclined to vote her rather a failure. As for Perseus, he frankly enjoyed the simplicity of plot and the far greater simplicity of acting. It was all so unspeakably ingenuous as almost to create a new sensation. The comic man was so strenuously comic as to leave no doubt of his intention. He would indeed have been a dull dog who did not guess that the actor was striving his hardest to be funny. The audience laughed immoderately and indiscriminately, whether it was at the antics of the comedian or the agony of the hero. During an appalling appeal

to the deity, a cat with round, green eyes strolled across the stage and glared across the footlights. The creature was applauded convulsively—which proved that the audience was not so indiscriminating after all.

As they walked back to the hotel Andromeda declared that she was anything but satisfied. Perseus, on the other hand, assured her that he had enjoyed himself immensely. It is true the hero was a fool, but he was in the mood to sympathise with fools. She did not ask him why. Garrulous as she was by nature, there were times when she was content to think.

‘What do you make of the hero?’ she asked suddenly.

‘Not much.’

‘I mean of the hero generally.’

‘He seems to be born to misfortune.’

‘And to triumph. I think the world is all the better for heroes.’

‘Have you ever read Carlyle?’ he asked.

‘No.’

‘You must, Andromeda, even though it destroys the hero of melodrama.’

‘I have an idea that the real hero is never so nice as the imaginary one.’

‘Perhaps you’re right. I know an inexpressibly

stupid person who won the V.C. in South Africa. Poor chap, he can never forget it.'

'I should like to be a man and win the V.C.'

'I think you would win it, too,' he responded gravely.

She did not press for an answer, but instinctively drew nearer to him. The pressure of her body against his thrilled him strangely. To have slipped his arm round her would have been so easy just then, and so agreeable. When she turned her eyes up to him they gleamed strangely in the night. He walked on with head erect, a quaint smile on his lips.

Supper was spread for them, but, according to orders, there was no one in attendance. He felt that it would be better for them to be alone, and she allowed him to see that she appreciated his foresight.

'You think of everything,' she said. But she insisted upon attending to his wants. 'I, too, have a hero,' she remarked.

'Who is not selfish enough to let you wait on him. You must be tired, Andromeda. You have done a lot to-day.'

'I cannot realise it all. It seems like years ago.'

That whimsical smile which she liked so well, even while not sure of understanding it, played round the corners of his mouth.

‘ Ambiguous,’ he said.

‘ Yet not so, really. You have shut off yesterday with a thick curtain of time.’

‘ Then do not peep behind it. Why should you ? ’

‘ Merely to know that this is real, and to congratulate myself accordingly.’

They were at the window now looking out into the quiet street.

‘ What a night,’ she said. ‘ I wish the car was out there now. I should love a run through the moonlight.’

She was so close to him that when she moved some portion of her clothing touched him. Her eyes were shining, and he marked the quick rise and fall of her breast. Though a man may be a hero, it is not wise continually to put his heroism to the test.

‘ I am afraid you would find it rather cold,’ he said. The words came with an effort, but he got them out.

A slow smile of amusement seemed to cross her face. She looked up at him, and he thought her beautiful mouth was curling in mockery. But he had consciously advanced the inept, and was ready to bear the effect of it.

‘ I have risked more dreadful things,’ she replied. Her voice was low, but so full of meaning that it

stirred him strangely. 'I should not mind the cold.'

She was looking up at him now, a curious, appealing light in her eyes. The rise and fall of her bosom bewildered him. It seemed to strain hard at the covering which confined it, as though it panted for freedom.

'By George!' he muttered, 'what a lucky thing we have decided to be such good pals, Andromeda.'

'Yes, isn't it? You see, it is possible after all. Do you think one-half of the world is wise?'

'Surely the proportion is excessive.'

'Yet the greater proportion says that this cannot be—this friendship of the man and the woman. We are going to prove its unwisdom. Perseus.'

'Yes.'

She touched him lightly on the arm. In the half-light her face looked bewitching: her bosom rose perilously near.

'I am always wondering what you really think of me—what you must think of me. Sometimes I hope that your thoughts are kind.'

'They are always that,' he assured her.

'And sometimes I fear. Shall I tell you everything?'

She looked up at him appealingly, confidingly. It was the manner and the face of a child suing for

pardon, a wistful, pathetic little face that had known many sorrows.

‘ Tell me nothing that is likely to cost you the least confusion or regret. Try to be happy, little girl. What does anything else matter ? ’

‘ With you I could not be otherwise than happy. But I hate this mystery—you don’t know how I hate it.’

‘ Yet I will not deny that it is not without its charm. Remember that we are not two inquisitive moderns who reckon our attachment by the status of our antecedents, but two brave pagans who roamed the world before the unspeakable Mrs. Grundy was born.’

‘ I think,’ she mused, ‘ that even the pagans must have had their Mrs. Grundy. It seems to me that hell in some shape or form must always have terrified poor mortals.’

‘ Socrates had a shrewish wife.’

‘ Do men reckon that the worst of evils ? ’

‘ Some men may. It seems to me that a man who loafs about at street corners all day isn’t good for much. No wonder his wife ragged him.’

‘ And you count yourself lucky in not having a wife at all ? ’

‘ At times I have ; but now——’

‘ Well, now ? ’

Oh, it was a wonderful face—a strong, lithe young body, and it was so near his own, so dangerously near.

‘Now,’ he answered in some confusion, ‘I am beginning to doubt.’

‘Fancy,’ she said, seeming involuntarily to draw back, ‘this is our first day, Perseus.’

‘Our first day. And you are not disappointed?’

‘On the contrary. You have made me so very happy that I think I shall soon forget.’

‘Forget all that is unpleasant, and you will make me happy too.’

‘I will try. Good-night.’

‘Good-night.’

Frankly she held out her hand, frankly he took it. For a moment their palms lingered, but there was no pressure in her fingers beyond that of friendship, nor did he embarrass her in any way. Yet when she was gone he took up his pipe and slowly began to fill it, and for more than an hour after he sat at the window smoking and telling his strange story to the stars. Coldly indifferent in their inscrutable wisdom they blinked at him through the night.

‘I wonder if the gods are dead?’ he muttered.

IX

IN every way she proved to be a most exhilarating companion. Always cheery, she seemed insensible to fatigue. He had but to offer a suggestion for her to acquiesce. Youth was hers, abundant, superfluous youth; youth glorious with the vitality of spring. Her eyes brightened: slowly the colour came back to her cheeks. The faint suspicion of wistfulness faded from her glance. She was as one who walked in the rays of the morning.

Critically he surveyed her, line by line, feature by feature. In all things was she not perfect; yet there was so much of physical perfection in her that criticism was silenced. The slope of the shoulder (singularly broad for one so slightly built), the depth of the chest, the curve of the hip, the poise of the chin,—were not all these things the very essence and acme of the feminine? For above all things was she feminine, breathing woman in every look, gesture, attitude. She seemed to exude the perfume of woman as a rose exudes its sweetness; and to his thinking never was rose or

any other flower of the garden or the wild half so deliciously fragrant. Of the manner of their coming together he scarcely dared to think : of their ultimate parting he would not think at all. Yet the situation appealed irresistibly to his whimsical humour. Surely it was the quaintest adventure that ever befell a man in these prosaic days ?

By the early post he received a letter from the indefatigable Smales, a long letter full of interminable explanations and a regret with which, to tell the truth, he had little sympathy. The gist of the letter was that there was likely to be considerable delay ; but though that seemed greatly to distress Ixion it did not appear to cause his master the least shadow of concern. He handed it over to Andromeda with a smile, watching her face intently as she perused it.

‘ Then he won’t be coming down to-day ? ’ she asked.

‘ So it appears.’

‘ I ’m glad.’

‘ So am I.’

They looked at each other across the breakfast-table and smiled.

‘ I wish he would never come at all,’ she said.

‘ That might be awkward.’

‘ His coming will spoil everything.’

‘ Not necessarily.’

‘ I am sure he is a prying creature.’

‘ He ’s a good man, is John.’

‘ I hate good men.’

‘ Andromeda !’

‘ I mean, I hate some men who profess to be good, for of course it ’s all profession. None of them is really good. That ’s why I like you.’

‘ Because I ’m not good ?’

‘ Because you don’t profess to be. The best men, like the best women, are those whom the world calls bad.’

‘ But of course you don’t expect me to endorse such an outrageous proposition ?’

‘ I expect you to stand by your own judgment and experience of life, and not blindly to bow the knee to convention.’

‘ Have I bowed it ?’ he asked, his eyes smiling into hers.

‘ I am a silly chatterer,’ she admitted. ‘ I wonder if you understand me ?’

‘ What if I understand you better than you understand yourself ?’

‘ No, no !’ She shook her head emphatically. ‘ That is quite impossible. You can only guess : I know. But I ’m glad he ’s not coming down. Telegraph to him and tell him not to hurry. The

man is a positive nuisance with his scrupulous ideas of duty. I hate those stolid, heavy, unimaginative people who put duty before everything. You wouldn't be so absurd ? '

' You are giving me a character this morning.'

' I have already given you one—of the best. But I am angry with you, Perseus. Why did you sit up so late last night ? '

' But did I ? I really don't remember.'

' I couldn't go to sleep until you came.'

' Why,' he said, a curious, musing light in his eyes, ' that 's strange ! '

' Is it ? Perhaps it is. I suppose a woman does many things a man thinks strange, only they don't seem strange to her. That is just the difference between a man and a woman. Sometimes I think they really never understand each other.'

' Perhaps that failing does not detract from the charm. Do you think we should find the sphinx so interesting once we had solved her riddle ? '

' So you are one of those men who still insist upon calling woman a riddle ? '

' What if I prefer to think so ? '

' I believe it must be that quality which makes of men great poets, great painters, great musicians. You can cheat yourselves with the pleasures of imagination, make the unreal seem the real, dwell

in a land of make-believe : and that too in spite of wars, savagery, labour, and a thousand sordid facts. Men are wonderful, Perseus.'

' But not so wonderful as women.'

' I like them better.' He looked hard at her. ' Yes, in spite of that. There are monsters, of course. Our misfortune is to be brought in contact with them. But on the whole men are rather fine.'

' They do not always appear so to each other.'

' The little dog snaps at the big dog's legs ? Well, that only proves what a very little dog it is.'

' There are so many little dogs,' he remarked with a smile. ' No, I 'm not a cynic, Andromeda, though I am of opinion that the trend of modern life is towards cynicism. You see, we no longer take even our heroes on trust. The day of blind faith and blind obedience is past. A wiser epoch reigns, and on the whole I think a better.'

' I wonder if it is wiser, better ? And what makes you think that the day of blind faith and obedience is past ? I see no sign of it. We still raise our altars to Baal and neglect the true God. Instead of worshipping the hero we bow before the mediocrity. Not content with setting the commonplace on a pedestal, we offer it our homage.'

A smile broke slowly over his face, a rare smile replete with unaffected admiration.

‘ You shall teach me wisdom, O Andromeda, thou daughter of wise-eyed Pallas. It strikes me that I am sadly in need of it.’

‘ Then give me the chance.’ She was laughing now. ‘ Tell Ixion not to hurry.’

‘ If he hurries I will twist his unspeakable neck.’

While she was away he wrote to Smales telling him on no account either to hurry or to worry himself, while above all things he was to be sure and wait for the new wheel, and bring it along with him when he came. Just then he had no use for Ixion, his chief dread being that the manufacturers were not likely to prove sufficiently laggard. He laughed softly to himself as he thought it all out.

For a certainty the charm of Andromeda was not lessening. Each hour seemed to disclose some new wonder. Strenuously he endeavoured to stifle all unnatural curiosity, to curb his wild flights of conjecture. Vowed he over and over again that he would accept the circumstance as it stood, cease to wonder, and thank the gods for their beneficence. And of a truth he did exceedingly well ; but while human nature is as it is one is subject to restrictions. He could not cease to wonder as to her identity ; how she had come to be in such a position, and how this most amazing friendship would end. And here a sudden fear played havoc with his feelings, filled

his imagination with terror. Of course this connection might end at any moment. And what then ?

She came in ready for their walk and looking radiant. Again the woman was once more pre-eminent. He noticed the supremely feminine touches of her attire, observed the little nicknacks which she had purchased, and which he had not even thought of.

‘ You look charming,’ he said.

‘ But you must not tell me so.’ Yet he knew that the compliment was not ill-received.

‘ Why not ? ’

‘ You would not tell a man friend that he looked charming.’

‘ Of course not.’

‘ But I am a man friend.’

‘ So you are. I had forgotten.’

He did not think it necessary to explain that one does not buy skirts and blouses for a man friend, not to mention dainty underwear. But if it was her whim, why not accede to it ? Though she called the relationship by any name she chose, it did not alter the positive fact that she was an extremely fascinating creature.

That day they explored most of the quaint byways of Guildford. In the morning they walked, but after lunch they drove. She professed delight in

the town and its surroundings : his delight lay in hers. It seemed to him that she had a quick eye for detecting both the beautiful and the ridiculous : a quick wit too might have been hers in other circumstances. Sometimes the light laugh checked itself with a suddenness which arrested attention. It seemed as though she suddenly remembered that she ought not to laugh. Then and then only was she unable to meet his glance. Sometimes a curve like a little whimper saddened the corners of her mouth. Then it was that the mouth itself appeared almost to age.

‘Andromeda,’ he said suddenly, as they rolled slowly back towards the town, ‘I want you to pardon me.’

‘What for?’

‘I have been guilty of a most inconceivable oversight.’

‘O—oh!’

‘You’ve only got that one costume. What must you think of me?’

She laughed up into his face. Her blue eyes were dancing mischievously.

‘Well, isn’t one enough? I’m not on my honeymoon.’

‘I wish you were,’ he muttered. She pretended not to hear him.

‘Look at that quaint old creature,’ she said.

It was a bent, careworn woman of the labouring classes, poorly nourished, wretchedly clothed. She was carrying a huge bundle across her back, and as they rolled slowly by she turned on them a pair of wistful, strained, hungry eyes. The day was hot, the road dusty, the woman looked weary beyond endurance.

There was something more than quaintness about all this. Indeed the contrast flashed through him as the lightning flashes across a sombre sky, and he suddenly called upon the driver to stop. Without further word he sprang from the fly and made hastily towards the woman, who had turned wearily and was watching them through the dust. A thousand times he would have passed her on the road in his car without dreaming of stopping. They are not always callous who appear to be. But just then an impulse of which he was scarcely aware, which he could not have analysed if he tried, urged him to the act.

Andromeda, looking over the back of the cab, saw him bend forward reverently towards the poor creature, and then give her money. She could look no more, for a sudden shudder swept through her, and her heart leapt to her throat. But when he took his seat beside her once again her hand slipped into his.

‘ That was good of you, Perseus.’

‘ Oh, not at all. Poor creature. I ought to have carried her bundle.’

‘ What made you do it ? ’

‘ ’Pon my soul I don’t know,’ he answered lightly.

‘ Shall I tell you ? ’ She looked at him with wistful, questioning eyes. ‘ You thought of the contrast.’

‘ It was a woman,’ he admitted.

‘ Have you always been kind to women ? ’

‘ I ? Oh, I ’m afraid I have thought chiefly of myself.’

‘ Just think of it, Perseus. I may become like that poor creature—or worse.’

‘ You ! What an idea ! ’

‘ She is probably a better woman than I have ever been. Did you notice her eyes ? ’

‘ Yes.’

Would he ever forget them—the weary, weary pain of them !

‘ It ’s a fine world, Perseus,’ she said bitterly.

He agreed with her.

X

ANDROMEDA had many whims and moods, but they never lasted long enough to grow wearisome. Perhaps her transilience was not one of her least charms. Before they had reached the town she seemed to have forgotten all about the wayworn creature of the roadside. A powerful motor car rushing by smothered them with dust.

‘I hate motor cars,’ she gasped in a choking voice.

‘So do I—when I ’m not in one.’

Then they both laughed. It is pleasant to laugh even if it is at the topsy-turvyness of the world.

They dismissed the cab in the High Street and sauntered by the shops. He stopped before the emporium where he had made his first purchases.

‘You ’ll want those things,’ he said.

‘I told you I should prove expensive. But I would rather not—really. You have done so much.’

‘Come and let me introduce you to Miss Ellis. But no—on second thoughts I don’t think I will.’

The ordeal is too great. Do you mind going yourself ? ’

She smiled. Does a woman mind going shopping—does she mind buying herself pretty things ?

‘ But it ’s getting serious,’ she protested.

‘ That ’s the charm of it.’

‘ I ’ll be as careful as I possibly can.’

‘ No, please don’t. Be beautiful.’

At dinner she presented herself in a new gown. Her face was radiant, her eyes deep blue like sapphires and brighter than any gems.

‘ You are beautiful,’ he said.

‘ I ’m glad you like it, Perseus.’

Though he noticed the distinction he did not remark upon it. Come what might he would play the game.

Decorously they sat opposite each other : nothing could have exceeded his politeness or her manner. The rusty-faced waiter was grave as a judge. It was only when he turned aside, or left the room, that a humorous twinkle might have been seen in his mellow eye. They might pretend what they like, but it was not the first time he had waited on such couples. Usually he found them much inclined to generosity, grateful for the least consideration. He never obtruded his presence more than was absolutely necessary. Also he never entered without

knocking. That was one of the little niceties of good service which he found to be much appreciated. Nor did he ever enter immediately upon the knocking. A most conscientious fellow—who did not go unrewarded. Certainly they called each other by two of the queerest names that he had ever heard, but even that did not surprise him. He had heard queerer things in his time.

‘Here’s something for you, Ganymedes,’ said Vermont as he slipped half a sovereign into the spacious palm.

‘George, sir,’ replied the unctuous one.

‘I prefer the other. But no matter; the office is the same.’

George, or Ganymedes, opened a wistful if watery eye. He did not know what the gentleman was driving at, but he did know that the gold was good. And if one, why not the others? Life, even in a country town, held many possibilities.

The young lady in the office was also interested in the pair. She felt sure that Andromeda was an actress at least. The register showed ‘Mr. and Miss Carey Vermont,’ but, as she naïvely suggested, she had ‘been there before,’ adding colloquially, if somewhat ambiguously, that she ‘wasn’t taking any,’ and winding up the whole with a significant, if equally ambiguous, ‘not half.’

‘ ‘E calls ‘er Dromedary,’ said George, by way of explanation.

‘ Dromedary,’ exclaimed the young lady, ‘ good lor’ ! And what does she call him ? ’

‘ Percyhus.’

‘ You mean Percy ? ’

‘ Well, p’r’aps that’s ‘er manner of saying it. They talk the queerest lingo : don’t know what they ‘re drivin’ at arf the time. I believe they ‘re furriners.’

‘ What nonsense ! The gentleman speaks perfect English.’

‘ Well, ‘e don’t speak it same as me.’

‘ I should hope not.’

‘ Though I told ‘im my name was George—plain George—‘e goes on calling me Granny Meads—just as if I was a blessed old woman.’

‘ So you are, and a stupid one too. You ought to be a detective.’

But George’s stubby fingers were fingering the gold piece in his waistcoat pocket. He had no objection to being stupid at the price.

Though Carey Vermont had made up his mind to fulfil his strange contract to the letter, he could not hide from himself the fact that it was incongruous in the extreme, and one of which it would be folly to attempt a minimising of the dangers.

Yet never for a moment did he waver in outward consideration of her. Inwardly, it is true, he was much perturbed; for, try he never so hard, he could not but acknowledge her subtle influence, and he wondered how it was going to end. She, on the other hand, appeared to be perfectly unconscious of her power, nor did the situation seem to appeal to her as being anything out of the ordinary. Sometimes he thought her looks betrayed a deeper meaning than her words. She must know as well as he how extraordinary was this situation, and, like him, wonder what was to be the end of it. But all this she covered with so charming an inconsequence that he was forced to take his tone from her. In some amazing manner they had come together, and in an equally amazing manner the connection would continue.

Among her other accomplishments was that of music. In their sitting-room was a small piano, the tone of which happened to be quite good. He had seen it there, but having no faith in wayside instruments, had not dared to open it. Casually he asked if she could play. She admitted that she could—a little. With some trepidation he suggested that she might try the instrument. She made no demur—she never demurred at anything. But she no sooner touched the piano than he became all attention.

‘It’s rather a nice tone,’ she said, turning to him with a smile.

‘Play, Andromeda.’

She played on and on. He found here that they had a common sympathy. She finished a dreamy nocturne of Chopin, and again turned to him, the music in her eyes.

‘Of course you sing?’

‘A little.’

He knew she must from the sweetness of her voice. She sang a quaint little French song, ‘Obstination,’ with its wailing ‘en mourir, en mourir.’ A second time she sang it for him. He was enraptured. Her voice was a soprano, of no great compass, but exquisitely sweet.

‘Who are you, Andromeda?’ he said.

‘What do you mean?—who am I?’

‘You are an artist.’

‘Do you think so? What do you think of this?’

She sang him Godard’s ‘Berceuse de Jocelyn,’ a haunting, wailing, beautiful thing, which seemed to wring the very soul out of him.

‘Dors, dors ! le jour à peine a lui.’

‘Don’t!’ he said.

‘Why?’

But he would not tell her—or perhaps his eyes told her. She rose and softly closed the piano.

Crossing to the window she looked out into the street.

‘What a beautiful night!’ she said.

‘Let us go out in it.’

It was not night, but a more balmy, a more beautiful day. Night comes late in the summer and goes early. There was a mellow softness in the air which the day never knows, a lingering opalescence in the sky which made all things exquisitely clear. Away over the trees was a crescent moon with one bright star. Other couples were slowly pacing the same road, each couple apparently oblivious of the other’s presence.

‘You are an artist, Andromeda,’ he repeated. She laughed softly.

‘I used to be fond of singing.’

‘And are not?’

‘Not now.’

‘Why?’

‘It has memories.’

‘I think you sing deliciously.’

‘Then I will sing for you.’

‘Not if it awakens memories you would rather forget.’

‘Oh, what does it matter now? Once I thought that one would forget if one wished to. But that is impossible, so why trouble?’

‘I would not have you remember unhappy things.’

‘Then you must rob me of this thing called memory.’

‘I would do that too, if I could : I would make you forget everything up to the day of our meeting.’

‘I wish you could,’ was her earnest response.

‘Let me try.’

‘To change the seasons, stop the rise and fall of the tide ? We too have our ebb and flow. Sometimes I wish mine would carry me away out to sea and never bring me back. Did you see those lovers ?’ she asked, changing her theme with that suddenness with which he was fast growing accustomed.

‘Which ?’

‘Where are your eyes, Perseus ?’

‘In yours, I think. But what of those lovers ?’ He looked round as if to make good the omission.

‘The moment passes, Perseus, and the pity is that we do not know it.’

‘Is this my moment ? Andromeda.’

‘Well ?’

‘I am falling desperately in love with you.’

‘You know perfectly well that you’re not.’ She laughed lightly. ‘Besides, you know that you mustn’t. And it’s not fair to talk like that. You

make me think things. Moreover, I don't believe you know what love is.'

'You could teach me.'

'I shall not try. You know the bargain, Perseus : just pals. I am sorry if that is not enough ; but there is no more. Remember, you have agreed to tell me when the contract palls.'

'I remember. Andromeda, look into my eyes. Can you see shame there ? '

'Not shame : just a little regret.'

'Yet there should be shame, for I am ashamed of myself. Yet perhaps you understand. If so, you will not judge me too harshly. Look on it as a touch of vanity. There is no reason why I should appeal to you.'

'On the contrary, there is every reason. Only this is an ideal friendship of ours, and I don't want to spoil it.'

'I don't believe you trust me yet.'

'Surely I have trusted you as no man was ever trusted before ? Why, I have let you do things for me that if—if I had any reputation to lose, would be my ruin. Fortunately I have none, nor little wish for any. I cannot conceive the possible use of a reputation. Why should people bother about one ? And what is a reputation ?—whom does it affect ? '

‘ No one but a woman.’

‘ And when the woman is above a reputation ? ’

‘ She cannot be.’

‘ Perseus, that sentiment savours of the respectable middle classes, and I ’m sure you ’re not that : those classes which are still so servile as to pardon in their so-called “ betters ” what they would not overlook in their own ranks. What of the queens, princesses, ladies of title who are known to be—— Perseus, Perseus, this will not do. You know as well as I that we speak with bated breath of the sins of those in high places, as though their misdeeds were something too sacred for us even to discuss. You smile : I exaggerate grossly ? But do I ? That smile of yours is the sure passport of the elect to perpetual supremacy. If you would not smile in that superior way there might be hope.’

‘ For what ?—for whom ? ’

‘ For me—for you.’

‘ Perhaps you ’re right. But what does it all amount to ? How can we alter things ? If the world condones in others what it blames in us, so much the worse for the world—and for us. Anyway, for the majority of us it is so hopeless that I cannot withhold admiration from those who have had sufficient temerity to seize the advantage, and insolence enough to hold it.’

‘ They could not hold it but for fools.’

‘ With which, luckily for them, this globe is over-peopled.’

‘ And yet we sneer at the Arab and his kismet.’

‘ It is that imaginary right to sneer at others which holds us in thrall. Andromeda, we are wading a little out of our depth : let us turn round. This ocean of speculation is boundless : there is no finality to what might be.’

‘ And the vast majority are still in thrall.’

‘ Still in thrall, and perfectly content with their thralldom.’

‘ I hate and despise them,’ she said vehemently.

‘ Quite right : it ’s really all they ’re worth. But they also have their uses, and the wise ones use them.’

XI

EACH hour showed some new phase of her character. Like a true woman she was essentially a contradiction, but a contradiction so charming as to melt opposition and annihilate logic. It rather amused him to find heresy issuing from such a charming mouth. Orthodoxy and beautiful paganism could not with propriety walk hand in hand ; but if impropriety were always to assume such a fascinating guise he could quite comprehend its power.

The next morning he received another despairing letter from Ixion. That worthy had duly carried out instructions, but being entirely in the hands of the manufacturers he could not say when the order would be completed ; though he, Carey Vermont, might rest assured that not a moment would be wasted by ' Yours respectfully, J. SMALES.'

As a matter of fact, Carey Vermont was thinking little and caring less what became of J. Smales. Nevertheless, he as usual handed the letter across to Andromeda, and watched her curiously as she

eagerly glanced through the missive. With a sigh of relief she laid it on the table.

‘ Another free day,’ she said ; ‘ what shall we do with it ? ’

‘ Whatever you please.’

She was looking radiant, and his glance was full of admiration. Each day, each hour, almost, she seemed to increase in loveliness. The shadows had gone from under the eyes, and that strange pallor of the skin which he had first noted had almost entirely disappeared.

‘ You are happy, Andromeda ? ’

‘ Perfectly.’

She seemed surprised at the question, not a little of which surprise was betrayed in the tone of her reply. He felt that the question was both awkward and unnecessary. Yet perhaps it was prompted as much by thought of himself as of her.

‘ Look,’ she said, holding out her hands. The dull circles round her wrists had almost faded away. ‘ In another day or two they will be gone.’

Closely he examined the dainty wrists. He would have kissed them had he dared.

‘ How you must have suffered ! ’ he said.

‘ It was not nice,’ she admitted. ‘ I must have been there two or three hours before you came. Once two men passed on the other side of the

plantation—rough men by their voices. I was afraid to call them. I wonder what would have happened? And yet, as the time passed and no one came near, I was sorry that I had not called. They could not have treated me worse than—— I was beginning to despair when you came. How surprised you looked.'

'I was.'

She smiled across at him with clear eyes.

'You were very generous. I liked you for the way you did it, Perseus. You were a dear.'

'And suppose I had been one of those rough men?'

'Just then I was wavering betwixt extremes, with anger, perhaps, predominant. I would have welcomed the brute or the angel. Either could have bargained with me, and I should have kept the bargain. Perhaps the brute would have been the more welcome, for I was aflame with anger, and might even have delighted in my own degradation. You do not understand the feeling? I think it must be purely feminine. We are amazing creatures, Perseus: there is no comprehending us.'

'I almost wish I had been a brute,' he said.

'But I should have hated you in the end. You guess that I am not an angel?'

'I am content to wait for the angels. Later, I have no doubt, I shall appreciate them more.'

She made a quaint little mouth.

‘ I rather expected a compliment there.’

‘ But you forget that compliments are forbidden—among pals.’

She was inexpressibly bewitching just then. Almost he thought that there was a challenge in her smile, defiance in her glance.

‘ How old are you, Perseus ? ’ she asked suddenly.

‘ Spare my grey hairs.’

‘ There are a few above the ears.’

‘ Thirty-six,’ he said.

‘ So many ! ’

‘ Years, not hairs. Am I too old ? Have I lived too long ? ’

‘ I am twenty-five, and I have lived longer than you. In ten years’ time I shall be an old woman.’

‘ You will not think so then. After thirty the women of these days grow younger.’

Slowly she shook her head.

‘ I shall paint, dye my hair, corset tighter, massage my face before going to bed, but I shall not grow younger. Perhaps I shall grow fat and develop a double chin.’

She laughed at the horrors which were so far away, as the young make a jest of death. He could not conceive it possible that she should ever lose the wonderful line of that dainty chin. When

he first saw the Venus de Milo he sat gazing with wonder at the superb line of chin and mouth and brow. Years after he sat and watched it again, and the same perfect line was there. The years had left no impress on the marble. A thousand years hence she would be the same. Just then he thought of that grand stone creature, and felt a pang for women.

‘At all events,’ he said, ‘that is a long way off. You are perfect now, Andromeda.’

‘I see you insist on the compliment. I wonder what J. Smales will think?’

But she was smiling as one who was secretly amused, and he took courage from the sign.

‘Oh, hang J. Smales! I too shall presently begin to consider him a nightmare.’

‘Is he married?’

‘Yes—at least, I believe so.’

‘And you have taken him away from her? How cruel!’

‘On the contrary, I ’m giving him a holiday.’

‘What is she like, then?’

‘Just what the wife of a man called J. Smales would be. You can see her?’

‘I can. Curious that these people should be so very like us.’

‘I believe they are born in pretty much the

same manner. Nature is too consistently uniform to be just. But we have our revenge on her.'

'How?'

'By rising superior to her vain attempts at leveling. One portion of her creatures passes its days in looking up, the other in looking down. I suppose we know the right from the wrong, as the right and the wrong go in this world, but for want of a sight of the true God we set up false idols. And probably the idols are quite good enough for the worshippers.' An amused smile played round the corners of her mouth. 'A nice early morning discourse?' And he laughed. 'Let us get out in the sun.'

Later in the day they mounted the adjacent hill known as the Hog's Back. A more imaginative people would have given this beautiful elevation a more charming name, something fanciful, or at least suggestive of the poetic. Or perhaps the person who christened it may have thought a fine hog a beautiful sight. One should not be quick to judge. Andromeda thought the view charming, and sitting on the grass some distance from the wayside let her eyes wander across the valley and the wide expanse of far-stretching country. It had been a pretty stiff pull up the hill, but they were well rewarded by the exquisite view. The

exertion had brought a charming colour to her face. She breathed hard, but with evident enjoyment of the act of breathing, inhaling the golden-scented air with the utmost relish.

Sprawling on the grass by her side he looked up into her face and thought strange, wild, impossible things. With exultation his eyes wandered over her, from her dainty feet and ankles, seen by the skirt shortening as she sat, to the crown of her glorious hair. There was no flaw in her, and a sudden, intense longing for her burned like fire through his blood. This was the woman of women : the one thing he desired above all things on earth, in heaven. The fulness and the madness of summer was upon the land, and in his brain and in his blood.

All unconscious, she gazed away across the landscape, chatting volubly the while ; but as she turned the movement brought her closer to him. Mingled with the sun and the air, the sweetness of the grass and of the good brown earth, was the sweetness of this adorable creature : a subtle perfume, as it were, that flew like a narcotic to the brain. He caught her in his arms, drew her down to him, and kissed her passionately.

For a moment or so she lay passive in his arms, letting him kiss her mouth, her cheeks, her neck. Her eyes closed like one who is faint and giddy,

and he kissed the heavy, white lids. Against his hand he felt the tumultuous rise and fall of her bosom. Then like one suddenly awaking from a lethargy she pushed him away.

‘Don’t, Perseus.’

‘I’m sorry. No, I’m not sorry : I’m glad.’

‘Is this being good pals?’

‘I love you, Andromeda.’

‘Would you kiss a man friend like that?’

‘Good God, no!’

‘You seem to forget that I am a man friend : you seem to forget all that you promised to remember.’

‘I admit it. I forget all but that you are an adorable woman, and that I love you madly.’

‘I knew you would spoil everything,’ she said regretfully. ‘And I was beginning to feel so happy.’

‘You shall be happier.’

‘No, no, there can be no happiness for me. But I did think I could trust you, for I believed you to be different from other men. Now you have ruined everything.’ She looked at him reproachfully, but with a quick gesture silenced his protest. ‘What is the use of talking? Naturally I am to blame : I laid myself open to it. But I am sorry. I had hoped for something quite different. Of

course a woman cannot do these things. I was mad to think she might. But it was so nice to be pals. Why did you do it, Perseus ? ’

There was more of wistfulness than of anger in her big eyes—as though conscious of the sudden loss of a dear ideal. He noticed the troubled expression, the quiver of the exquisite mouth, and he felt that he was all manner of unspeakable things.

‘ I did it, Andromeda, because I could not help myself ; because I have at last realised that you have become inexpressibly dear to me. Of course I know that I haven’t played the game. Not alone have I been unfair to you, but I haven’t even been fair to myself. I ’m a cad ! ’

‘ Oh, no ! But I wish you hadn’t. The conditions were so perfect. I was almost beginning to fancy that I was the real Andromeda ; that this was not modern England with its conventions, but a strange, far-off land which made our strange life possible.’

‘ Let it still be possible. Trust me, I will not offend again.’

‘ But if you love me ? ’

The eyes were full of a pathetic inquiry, clouded with a strange shadow of regret.

‘ I promise to give no sign.’

‘ But how shall I forget ? ’

‘By trying.’ She shook her head. ‘Andromeda, it will make me inconceivably unhappy if you do not forgive me. I shall believe you think even worse of me than I think of myself.’

‘Oh, but I don’t think badly of you at all. You have been extremely kind. I am only sorry.’

‘I too am sorry—in a way. Not that I kissed you: the marvel is that I did not kiss you long ago. But I am sorry that the circumstances make the act so unpleasant. If you only knew how contemptible I feel.’

‘Please don’t.’ She was smiling now, her eyes lingering in his with a pathetic, humorous insistence which made him long to commit the offence again for such another look. ‘Let us say no more about it. Of the two, I am the greater sinner.’

The bank on which they were sitting was perhaps some twenty or thirty yards from the roadway, the road itself, a long white ribbon stretching in the direction of Farnham, being up to that moment entirely free of any traffic, pedestrian or vehicular. But all of a sudden the whirring of a motor was heard in the distance, and cresting the brow of an incline on their right a great green car shot into view. Vermont was looking away across the wooded valley, his brows knitted with a curious line of thought. Plainly enough he heard the whir-

ring of the wheels, the snorting of the engine, though he had not curiosity enough to turn round. But Andromeda, whose eyes had caught the first gleam of the great car, stiffened perceptibly as she watched, though as it drew nearer she turned her head away and seemed to shrink deeper in the grass. When the great thing had rushed by with a roar, leaving in its wake a cloud of dust, he looked up at her and was amazed to find her pale and trembling.

‘What has happened? Are you cold?’ he asked anxiously.

She looked at him with some perplexity, like one who is in doubt as to the genuineness of the question. Then she laughed lightly, but not with that freedom which she evidently wished to convey.

‘It does seem absurd, but I really think I am.’

The sun was shining brightly; the breeze that came to them, warm and coy, was scarcely sufficient to stir the tops of the longest grasses. Summer was in the air, on the earth. He could not realise that she should be cold, and a sudden anxiety leapt to his eyes.

‘Let us walk,’ he suggested. She acquiesced without demur, but she was strangely silent as they retraced their steps.

As they approached the brow of the hill, which gave them a fine view of the old town, she

seemed insensibly to draw him away from the road.

‘Don’t let us return yet,’ she said. ‘It seems a pity to leave this view, and this air.’

‘Then you feel better?’

‘Ever so much. That sensation has quite passed away. It was ridiculous of me.’

Again she seated herself, he sprawling beside her on the grass.

‘Do you know, Andromeda, you frightened me horribly just now.’

‘Did I really?’

‘I could not help thinking, if anything were to happen.’

‘How awkward it would be for you? But you needn’t worry. Nothing good is ever likely to happen to me.’

‘I think I could bear the good.’

‘We will not quarrel over the term. Good and evil, they are just what they seem to the one most interested. By the way, did you see that car just now?’

‘I heard it. Do you know, I hadn’t curiosity enough to turn round.’

‘That was an error, Perseus. You might have found it interesting.’

‘In what way?’

‘ It belonged to the Monster.’

‘ You mean ? ’ He leaned forward, looking at her with eager eyes.

‘ Precisely.’

‘ That was why ?——’

‘ That was why.’

His look grew troubled.

‘ Andromeda.’

‘ Well ? ’

‘ Does it make any difference ? ’

‘ All the difference in the world—the difference between goodness and badness, between vice and virtue. Why does the sight of some people set all hell whirling within us ? ’

Her brows contracted until the eyes narrowed curiously : the little teeth came together with a sharp click.

‘ Did he see you ? ’ he asked anxiously.

‘ No ! I almost wish he had. The madman ! He was travelling at a terrific rate. I hope he has broken his neck at the hill. Let us go and see.’

But this impious hope was denied her. As they descended the twisting road there was no sight of the great green car. That providence which preserves the wicked, while it unceremoniously flings the good into the nearest ditch, had remained true to its character.

‘ I wish I had seen him,’ said Perseus unthinkingly : ‘ I might have known him.’

‘ If you had,’ she answered promptly, ‘ you would have seen no more of me.’

On second thoughts he was glad he had not seen him.

XII

BUT for the remainder of that afternoon the incident flung a shadow upon their intimacy. Arriving at the hotel Andromeda went at once to her room saying she would rest till dinner, and he was diplomatic enough to leave her in peace. That she was considerably distressed by this unexpected encounter there could be little doubt, and that it showed a less pleasing side of her character was likewise most evident. Who then was the man whom she, in keeping with their assumed characters, had designated the Monster? He would have given much to have caught a glimpse of him : even as it was there was a chance of discovering his identity through exhaustive inquiry. Yet this, too, might lay him, and her, open to suspicion, and on the whole he decided to let the incident go. Moreover, was he so unfortunate as he was at first inclined to think? If, as she had said, the seeing of him had meant seeing no more of her, then he was content to forego all knowledge of this sudden and mysterious rival.

Yet it was weary work trying to kill time till dinner. Forced absence from her proved more conclusively than he had ever dreamt how necessary she had become to him. Before that singular meeting on the hill-top, which at times even now he seemed scarcely to realise as a truth, he had been content to jog along with J. Smales as companion. Now he knew that such companionship would bore him intolerably. The glory of Ixion had departed : even the twirling of his wheel no longer fascinated by conjecture.

He strolled round to the garage, ostensibly to look at his crippled beauty, but in reality to kill time. Also it was possible that shelter might have been given to a car that came through Farnham. But if so he had heard nothing of it, nor did he think it necessary to make inquiries. Speaking generally, he was not inquisitive. Long ago he had found that the thing which people desired to hide was probably well worth hiding. One rarely learnt anything of value from probing into secrets. On the contrary, it frequently happened that exposure revenged itself in a peculiarly unpleasant manner. It is true there were great possibilities in Andromeda, some of which might be safely left in abeyance.

It was not without a little anxiety that he waited for her at dinner, but with her entrance all his fears

vanished. Whatever she may have thought or felt during the period of her absence, she certainly showed no trace of now. Her face was cloudless, her eyes were bright, her whole manner entirely fascinating. Close to observe her every mood, he became almost insensibly aware of a subtle change in her, a change which he at first had found some difficulty in analysing. It was not that she had grown absolutely harder and more defiant, but that feminine gentleness and ready acquiescence which he had so greatly admired seemed to have given place to a suggestion of daring, which she betrayed more in the glance of her eyes and the poise of her head than in what she actually said or did. Certainly he had never found her more fascinating. She prattled volubly of countless inconsequent matters, her eyes meanwhile never ceasing to play on him with merciless effect. Marvellous, too, how ingeniously she used her scanty wardrobe, and what a glorious crown she made of her hair. No man could possibly dream of the straits into which she had been driven by necessity ; no man would have seen in her aught but a beautiful woman in an extremely becoming gown.

Throughout the meal she exerted herself to charm as she had never done before. It seemed as though she was determined not to let go by a

single moment in dulness. Never had he known her wit so keen, her manner so adorable. She had even a smile and a word for the imperturbable Ganymedes of the rusty face. She was all life, gaiety, excitement, and even while Perseus made heroic if futile efforts to keep pace with her, he could not help wondering what it all might mean. But her constant sallies left him no time for gloomy speculation. She caught him up in the whirlwind of her fascinations and spun him round at will.

She smoked a cigarette with him over the coffee. Though it was not the first time he had seen her smoke, he watched her with a twinkle of curiosity.

‘Another of my vices,’ she said. ‘I am full of them to-night.’

‘Andromeda,’ he answered gravely, ‘I did not know until to-night that vices were so charming.’

‘You have not yet learned to live.’

‘Upon my soul I think you’re right. I seem to realise at last that I have been missing something.’

Her eyes were shining at him through a cloud of smoke, mystically luminous, compelling, insistent. A curiously fascinating curve showed the line of white teeth behind the red lips.

‘That is so like a man,’ she laughed. ‘There is no end to his vanity.’

‘But I assure you I feel extremely humble.’

‘Of all vanities that which apes humility is the most contemptible, because so hypocritical.’

‘Then you don’t believe in the gospel of humility?’

‘It has done more harm to the world than all the other vices put together.’

‘As, for instance?’

‘In stunting the development of mind, thought, action. It has kept the world back a thousand years.’

‘Then you are not an advocate of non-resistance? You would not turn the other cheek?’

‘No. Would you?’

‘I’m afraid not. You would hit back?’

‘Hard! Why should man be the only animal mutely to accept a flogging?’

‘Because he is the superior of all other animals.’

‘Who shows his superiority by allowing his brother animals to walk over him!’ A mocking smile gave a scornful curl to her mouth. ‘That is why the nations arm, and are always ready to fly at each other’s throat? Perseus.’

‘Well?’

‘Are you very stupid to-night, or am I?’

‘I can vouch for your brilliance at least. We will leave the other part of the question unanswered.’

‘And to what do you attribute that—brilliance?’

‘The natural state of an exceedingly versatile mind.’

She smiled. ‘You should be called Ulysses, the wily one.’

‘I assure you I never felt less wily in my life. All that is primitive in my nature is simply surging to the top. I am like a boy, Andromeda, and you have bewildered me. I think you are wonderful to-night.’

‘Only to-night?’

‘Always, but to-night more so than ever.’

‘I wonder how much of that you mean?’

‘Have you not forbidden me to say?’

They were sitting with elbows on the table looking across at each other. His gaze was full of a frank admiration which he made not the slightest effort to conceal. Now and again her heavy brows went together in serious thought. She was as one who is trying to see definitely through a mist, as one who believes that the truth is hidden there if she could only see it.

‘If I could only be sure.’

‘Let me try to convince you.’

‘What’s the use? I cannot be convinced against my will.’

‘And I cannot convince you?’

‘I did not say that.’ She smiled. ‘You think

it strange that I should be scrupulous? Yet it seems stranger to me. Many people would call it absurd. Perhaps it is, but many people might not understand.'

He frankly admitted to himself that he was one of their number; but when that curious speculative mood of hers was on there was little to be gained by argument. Slowly he arose and crossed to the open window.

'It's a beautiful night,' he said: 'what do you say to a stroll?'

'Would you rather?'

'I am in your hands, Andromeda.'

'But I don't want you to be in my hands; I want to be in yours. I want you to say what I am to do. To-night the command is yours.'

'Then we will stay in, and you shall sing to me.'

He did not notice the deep and instantaneous glow that passed over her face and neck, for he had turned to ring the bell. With the arrival of George he began soberly to fill a pipe. Then she opened fire on the rusty one with a series of questions. Were there many visitors in the hotel? No one but themselves, answered Ganymedes. Did motorists usually put up at that house? At times quite a number. Had many arrived that day? Only one, who had come rather early from Win-

chester, but he only stopped to have a drink and buy some petrol. Then he took the London Road.

'One would come through Farnham from Winchester?'

'More'n likely,' answered the rusty one, 'especially if 'e wanted to do the 'Og's Back.'

When he had gone she turned to Perseus, who was questioning her with an amused smile.

'I don't want to annoy the other visitors,' she explained.

'Ever considerate.'

'Well, you know, they might not appreciate my singing as much as you do. Now sit down and smoke, and don't try to think that you are unhappily married. I promise you that last evil shall not be yours.'

'Then you are not going to marry me?'

'I promise. I have too much respect for you, *mon ami*.'

'But, hang it all! don't say you respect me. That would be the last straw. You'll be looking on me as a brother next.'

'I never had a brother,' she replied, an odd catch in her voice.

'You are lucky.'

'I wonder?'

She turned to the piano. He drew the easy-

chair into a position which enabled him to watch her face. Then she began to sing.

She sang and played to him, *bene placito*, filling in the interludes with snatches of conversation to the low accompaniment of the piano. Perseus lay back in his chair and watched her every movement of supple body and supple wrist. There were no contortions of the face, no straining at top notes. Such voice as she possessed was admirably produced, the best being got out of it with the least effort. Sentimental ballad or showy chanson came alike to her: she was pathetic and brilliant by turns. One quaint French piece set his blood singing, his pulses leaping. 'Amour, amour'—the world seemed full of love. Everything else faded into nothingness. There was nothing worth living for but love—the love of a man and a woman! There came to him a great longing to take her in his arms and hold her close, so close that he could count every beat of her heart, every struggling breath, hear the singing of her blood as it coursed madly through her veins. And yet he sat with chin in hand and watched her, outwardly so greatly master of himself, but inwardly as helpless as a drowning man in the grip of a tempestuous sea.

Sometimes she would stop and turn to him, her head perched quaintly on one side.

‘ Did you like that ? ’

‘ You sang it beautifully.’

‘ It is a pretty song.’

Who was she, and whence her accomplishments ? He hated that last word : it reminded him of inferior things, inferior creatures. And yet he thought of it for want of a better. Occasionally he was troubled with a curious, almost a mean, thought. One cannot for ever embrace the ideal, or live in a world of make-believe. A hundred times he told himself it did not matter who or what she was ; and again he as often found himself perturbed with mental inquiry. And then the charm of her personality would seize him once more, hold him with iron strength in its soft velvet grip, and spin him hither and thither at will.

Never before had he seen such a curve of chin and neck. It showed most markedly when she turned three-quarter face to him, which she did so frequently as to make him wonder.

‘ You have studied that pose ? ’ he said.

‘ Would you have a woman neglect an obvious duty to herself ? ’

‘ You are frank.’

‘ Why should I not be ? Nature has given the lion its strength, the cat its claws, the bird its

talons and beak. For nothing, think you, or mere accident ? ’

‘ And woman her beauty,’ he added.

‘ It is something out of the universal waste. You do not deny that beauty is power ? ’

‘ No.’

‘ You think me rather good-looking ? ’

‘ I think you are the most beautiful woman in the world. I think there never was such a woman as you.’

‘ Perhaps you’re right—though not exactly in that sense. Yet, after all, what is has been, and what has been will be again. There is nothing new under the sun.’

‘ Beauty is always new,’ he said.

‘ A variation of the universal octave,’ and by way of illustration she ran her fingers lightly over the keys.

‘ It is an abiding joy,’ he said.

‘ Not always.’

‘ It shall be so with me.’

‘ My dear Perseus, you are growing sentimental.’

She turned from him with a low laugh and dashed into a lively theme. Through the bewildering maze of sound his mind wandered slowly, now entirely at fault, and now seeming to see with clearness.

Yet so surely as he plunged forward, so surely did he return to the starting-place. The labyrinth wound innumerable intricacies about him. He stumbled forward merely to grope his way back again.

XIII

‘ I OFTEN wonder what becomes of our old loves.’

It was a lull in her singing, and he seemed unconsciously to utter the thought.

‘ Is it profitable to inquire ? ’ she asked, her head perched archly on one side, her lips rippling with amusement.

‘ Perhaps not. Sing that Italian song again.’

‘ Old loves,’ she continued musingly, her fingers lightly touching the keys, ‘ are like the roses of last year, the faint memory of some sweet perfume—a dream that on the whole we are not sorry to have dreamt. No hour of agony is without its moment of peace. It was a kindly thought of yours, Perseus, and one that has something deeper than kindness behind it. It lays bare your soul, *mon ami*, and you need not be ashamed of it. Many men are only too ready to forget the women who have ministered to their pleasure. I ’m rather glad you ’re not one of them.’

‘ Are you not sure that you rate me too highly ? ’

‘ I have no more illusions. The world has not pampered me enough to keep me childish. You have been kind to women ? ’

‘ My dear Andromeda, I lay no claim to any of the transcendent virtues.’

‘ But you wonder what becomes of the old loves, and you think kindly of them ? That is a star, Perseus, which seems to shine brightly above the desolate waste of women. Are you a man of many loves ? ’

‘ Andromeda ! ’

‘ Oh, I don’t blame you : only I hope you have been kind. Though a woman gives freely, she is also a creature of exquisite sensibility, and of a surpassing imagination. To her that pain is the acutest which sees the crumbling of an ideal. What do you think of women, Perseus ?—what do you really think of me ? ’

‘ You have forbidden me to say.’

‘ Perhaps I am wiser than I think.’

For a time neither spoke. Softly, dreamily her fingers wandered over the keyboard, and the music which issued thence seemed indicative of her thoughts. Strangely he watched her, almost gloomily. There was then a depth in this woman which he had failed utterly to fathom. He was like one who, standing in the midst of a vast plain,

gazes at the range of mountains that touch the horizon and wonders what lies beyond.

‘Have you ever been very happy?’ she asked at last, turning to him with eyes that were burning with thought.

‘At times I have fancied that something of happiness was mine.’

‘Fancied?’

‘To-night I know it might be.’

Again she ran her fingers lightly and swiftly over the keys, and then again more slowly, the weird melody coming to him in broken intervals like gasps from a choking throat.

‘Aren’t you tired of my playing?’

‘No,’ he answered simply. ‘Tired of her playing! It was a part of her!’

‘Then I am,’ she said. ‘Give me a cigarette.’

She left the piano and came to the table. He sprang hastily to his feet, gave her the cigarette and struck a match. She held up her face to his, and the glow of her eyes dazzled him. To control himself just then needed the supremest effort of his life. Her lips quivered faintly as with a smile of triumph. It did not need the flickering of the light to tell her he was trembling.

‘Don’t smoke,’ he said abruptly, blowing out the match.

‘ Why not ? ’

‘ It will spoil your mouth.’

‘ How ? ’

‘ The sweetness of your mouth.’

‘ Do you think my mouth sweet ? ’

‘ Good God ! ’

A sudden wave of madness swept over him. He caught her in his arms and kissed her wildly, furiously. He felt her pant and struggle, and the joy of that struggle was like wine to him.

‘ You will spoil everything,’ she said, releasing herself. But it seemed to him that her protest had lost much of its acerbity. Her bosom rose and fell rapidly : her face was flushed, her eyes burning.

‘ I love you, Andromeda.’

‘ But you must not. Remember our compact. Are you tired of it ? ’

‘ I shall keep it ; but I must love you too.’

‘ Love has a way of parting friends. Do you wish me to—go ? ’

‘ I cannot let you go.’

‘ Is that for you to say ? ’

‘ Yes—and no. If you go I shall be lost utterly.’

‘ If I stay you may be lost more utterly.’

‘ I’ll risk it ; but I must love you, dear.’

‘ So like a man,’ she said : ‘ he thinks only of himself. What of me ? ’

‘ May I not hope that in time you—— Andromeda, stay : I must continue to love you, but I promise not to offend again.’

‘ You promised once before.’

‘ Yes. Perhaps I shall not keep my word. Why the devil doesn’t Smales come ? ’ he added abruptly.

‘ Smales ! What a horrible thought ! But perhaps it would be better if he came. He is evidently a wise man, and may be of service.’

‘ I mean to say,’ he began quickly to explain, ‘ that if we could get away from this——’

‘ Why should we go away ? Don’t you like Guildford ? ’

‘ Too well.’

‘ And yet you want to go away ? Perseus, you are quite impossible to-night. I really must leave you.’

‘ Not yet.’

‘ Oh, but it ’s getting late. What will Ganymedes say ? ’

‘ Damn Ganymedes ! ’

‘ Now you are getting positively wicked,’ and she laughed brightly, roguishly up into his troubled eyes.

‘ Well, if it isn’t one, it ’s the other : if it isn’t Smales, it ’s that rusty-faced blighter.’

‘ So that between the wheel of Ixion and the tray of Ganymedes you are likely to be done to death ? Courage, *mon brave* ! Perhaps we shall circumvent them both. Good-night.’

‘ Must you really ? ’

‘ Really.’

She held out her hand, which he took in a tentative fashion ; nor did he read the meaning of her eyes, though he was looking straight into them. But the touch of her burning palm thrilled him strangely, and to save himself further confusion he turned hastily away and without speaking opened the door. She passed out, a strange smile on her lips, but a stranger light in her eyes.

For some time after she had gone he paced the room, a prey to intolerable doubt, nor did a copious whisky-and-soda help him to a solving of the problem. That this woman, so strangely met, of whom he knew so little, had suddenly grown inexpressibly dear to him was a subject which no longer offered facilities for argument or conjecture. That his first great interest had been awakened through the singularity of their meeting he was ready to admit, but such interest as that meeting had awakened had long since merged itself in other and dearer interests. He no longer plagued himself with asking who she was. That seemed an

infinitesimal matter in comparison with the greater issues which now perplexed him. That he could be greatly in love with her he did not doubt. The witchery of her presence flung a spell on him from which he had no wish to be free. That discretion upon which he had so often prided himself seemed to have flown with the winds. Of all that was desirable she was the most to be desired. Nothing else seemed to matter: nothing else really did matter.

He refilled his pipe, but smoked mechanically, with an utter absence of that enjoyment which comes to the man who knows that he is smoking. Occasionally he went to the window and looked out into the quiet street. Unconscious of time, he seemed to realise but vaguely that it was getting late. There was really neither late nor early now, but just a fierce, unsatisfied longing which completely whelmed all other knowledge, or rendered him indifferent to it.

He crossed over to the piano and pressed his face close down upon the keys, his lips resting where her fingers had rested, and something of the music she had made, which was like the soul of her, crept into his being. Though his arms enfolded space, yet had they enfolded her! In imagination he was embracing her once again.

‘ I love you, Andromeda,’ he whispered.

Whither was it leading him, this mad yearning for the strange woman? Her eyes shone kindly into his: the red mouth had a pathetic, plaintive whimper. Curiously lovely she was: curiously lovely they both were. He kissed that wonderful curve of throat and chin. How white she was, and how sweet!

‘ I love you, Andromeda,’ he said again.

He realised now as he had never done before the irrefragable supremacy of force: almost he sympathised with that passion which scorns convention. The imposition of custom, the restraint of laws! There were those who heeded not these things, wild outlaws of the day. And human nature was still the same—and she grew lovelier with thought.

Was it not all exceedingly marvellous? Dryad, hamadryad, nymph—had she not come to him as something out of the dead centuries? Again his eyes feasted on that white loveliness. It took his breath away.

‘ I love you, Andromeda,’ he moaned.

When he looked up she was standing in the open door, a curiously bewitching smile on her lips. A wrap of some kind had been flung so carelessly over her shoulders that it showed her smooth, white

breast : her bare feet were shining in the light. He sprang hastily towards her.

‘ Why do you not come ? ’ she said.

‘ Andromeda ! ’

‘ Yes, yes, I know,’ she whispered as she nestled in his arms.

BOOK II
THE MONSTER

I

THEY sat facing each other across the breakfast-table, the rusty-faced Ganymedes in attendance. Andromeda was as bright and brilliant as the day, but Perseus wore a look of some preoccupation. George of the mellow eyes moved softly from place to place, his well-worn suit of threadbare black shining gorgeously in the morning. Unaware of the restraint of one of the two, which was fast bordering upon irritability, he dawdled about in the most exasperating fashion performing all sorts of unnecessary duties, while Perseus, curiously enough, had not the courage to tell him to go. Yesterday he would not have stood on such ceremony with a much more important personage, but to-day he experienced some wholesome terror of those apparently unseeing eyes.

At last the sloppy one, having done over and over again the things which in an ordinary way he would never have dreamt of doing, slopped off, a much more intelligent look on his rusty face than one would have credited him with possessing.

‘ Confound the fellow,’ said Perseus, ‘ I thought he would never go.’

‘ He certainly has grown most attentive,’ she admitted.

He came round to her and caught her in his arms.

‘ I love you, Andromeda.’

She felt the hand on her shoulder tremble, and her whole body answered with a responsive throb. She did not speak, but she turned her face up to him and threw her arms about his neck. He kissed her brow, her eyes, her mouth.

‘ Now go and sit down like a good boy. What would Ganymedes say if he were to enter suddenly ? ’

He muttered something not wholly complimentary to that personage : nevertheless he obeyed. But the glance which she shot across at him compensated for the cruelty of the sentence.

‘ You are a dear,’ he said.

Never had he known life to sing so sweetly. Suddenly the world had grown full of a sincere and ineffable charm. Summer was humming without, and his blood was full of its luxuriance and its joy. The real woman had come into his life at last and filled to the brim his cup of destiny. He would drink deeply of it, too, drink to the last dregs.

‘ Andromeda,’ he said, ‘ and now ? ’

He had not spoken for some time, but she had

been steadily watching him through half-closed lids, so that she was almost prepared for the sudden interrogation.

‘ Well, what now ? ’

She met his gaze frankly, sincerely. There was no apparent effort at either composure or indifference, no suspicion of lingering doubt, uncertainty, or regret.

‘ What are we going to do ? ’

‘ My dear Perseus, have I not warned you that I abhor prosaic details ? Why seek to render such a friendship commonplace ? ’

‘ But, my dear girl ! ’

‘ Isn’t the dream a charming one ? ’

‘ So charming that I fear the awakening.’

‘ Then why wake ? I assure you I am not going to—I absolutely refuse to be awakened. This new ideal world of ours suits me so nicely that I refuse to accept tame realities. What do you want ? ’

‘ Nothing but you.’

‘ And you have me.’

‘ You are a darling,’ he said.

Her eyes shone. ‘ Let me live for a while in that belief.’

‘ But you would be none the less a darling in spite of those realities.’

‘ But surely I am real enough ? I see what it is, you are still curious, inquisitive ? ’

‘ Yes,’ he admitted, ‘ that ’s it. I want to know more of the woman I love. I thought it delightful to call you Andromeda, and to hear you call me Perseus, but all that was in a scarcely serious vein. I can’t go on calling you Andromeda now.’

‘ Why not ? I like it : and surely you don’t expect me to call you anything but Perseus ? Carey Vermont would seem to be a stranger. I told you once that my name was Andromeda Brown, but you made me change it.’

‘ Change it again,’ he said eagerly : ‘ make it Andromeda Vermont.’

‘ You don’t mean——’

‘ But I do. Why not ? ’

‘ You really mean it, Perseus,—you really mean that you want to marry me ? ’

Her eyes were wide with wonder, incredulity. A most lovely flush passed over her face and stained her white throat. Eagerly she leant towards him.

‘ That ’s what I mean,’ he said. ‘ Perseus married Andromeda.’

‘ And lived happily ever afterwards ? ’ She rose and came round to him and flung her arms about his neck. ‘ You dear, I love you for saying that.

It is sweet and good and generous of you ; but I too can be generous in my way.'

He slipped his arm round her waist and drew her on to his knee. It was a strong, caressing movement, which she answered by pressing her cheek to his.

'Have I not had proof?' he whispered as he kissed the tip of her dainty ear. 'I love you, Andromeda: every scrap of you is more precious to me than my own life. Why, I have only begun to live since I met you. You have filled my life with your own joyousness and beauty. I couldn't part from you now, my dear.' He caught her closer, kissing cheek and chin and neck and eyes. 'What wonderful lids you have,' he said: 'when they roll back they are like the shutters of heaven. I want you, Andromeda, I want you always to be near me. There must be not the remotest possibility of our separation.'

'Why should there be?'

'Because I have no hold on you.'

'Only the strongest. That other hold—the legal one—would not weigh so greatly with me. I could not suffer a man I did not love. Love makes all things easy, Perseus—even shame.'

'There must be no shame. Now do you understand?'

‘There is none. We have blotted out the word. This is summer, Perseus ; the earth is singing with joy. Let us sing with it. Be content,’ she continued earnestly ; ‘take me for what I am. It would profit you nothing to know my secret. I have been most unhappy, and my unhappiness has been slowly killing the better part of me. Restore it. Give me peace, give me love. It can’t last for ever : it is not the nature of these things. But while it lasts let it be all in all to us.’

‘It shall be all in all,’ he said, ‘and it shall last. Having found you, my beautiful, I cannot part with you again. All my life I seem to have searched for you. The quest is finished. I am content. For you I seem to have come upon earth, for you I remain. There is nothing but you, Andromeda, nothing but you in all the wide world.’

Never a doubt had she of his sincerity, though she looked at him with questioning eyes. The man’s voice quivered as he spoke, the hand that held hers trembled with the joy of an exquisite passion. Unresistingly she yielded to him, thrilling at the touch. In the street outside the traffic rattled by, the patter of feet on the pavement ; occasionally a hoarse cry or a blatant laugh leapt in through the open window. But all these passed unheeded. Summer was on field and hedgerow,

even there in the busy street, and summer was in their hearts.

At luncheon that day George brought Vermont a telegram, which upon reading he handed across to Andromeda without a word. Her brows slightly contracted as she read, but she was smiling as she looked across at him.

‘No answer,’ he said to the attendant Ganymedes, who immediately slouched off.

‘So he’s coming down to-day?’

‘So it appears.’

‘What a pity.’

The message was from Smales informing them that he would arrive that evening.

‘I never knew a manufacturer so prompt,’ protested Perseus.

‘Or a man so punctilious. I have a ghastly idea that his coming will spoil everything.’

‘But, my dear girl, how can it?’

‘I don’t know, but I feel I hate him already.’

He laughed. ‘Poor Ixion! I assure you he is quite harmless. But if you like I’ll wire him and tell him not to come.’

‘It might be too late now. Besides, mightn’t that make you look a little ridiculous?’

‘I don’t mind that—if you wish it.’

‘But I do not wish to make you look ridiculous.’

Only it seems a pity that a third person should intrude. I am very selfish, Perseus—I want you all to myself.’

‘ Then I ’ll telegraph to the beggar and tell him to stay.’ He sprang to his feet and strode towards the bell.

‘ No, no, please don’t. It would be too absurd. Besides it might be too late.’

‘ Then I ’ll pack the beggar back to town as soon as he arrives.’

‘ Without mending the car ? ’

‘ The devil take the car ! ’

‘ Perhaps he will also be good enough to take J. Smales.’

‘ I don’t care whom he takes so long as he leaves me you.’

‘ You love me, Perseus ? ’

‘ I adore you ! ’

‘ I like to hear you say these things. Is it foolish ? ’

‘ Is the truth foolish—is life foolish ? ’

‘ To some—perhaps.’

‘ But we are not living for them. I am sorry for the man who has not some dear woman to adore.’

‘ And what of the poor woman who has no man ? ’

‘ Oh, but a woman can always find somebody.’

‘ Can she ! That ’s all you know about it. Do

you never give a thought to the lonely, loveless woman—the woman who has all the strength and inclination to love wildly, fiercely, happily, yet who through force of circumstance is constrained to hide her unsatisfied yearning until it jars and wrings and tears her breast? If you have any pity, Perseus, spare it for the loveless woman.'

'Andromeda,' he said, 'I am a fool, but I shall learn wisdom through you.'

'You are a man, and men take so many things for granted. Women, on the other hand, live in a world of dreams, and unless love comes to them they perish. Why, of all creatures beneath the sun there is not one with the capacity to love like a woman. Her thoughts are your thoughts, her passions your passions. In her veins the blood runs as fiercely as in your own. Think what women do for love, what they become! This is a problem that man wisely shirks; but he will no longer be able to shirk it when he thinks more. The waste of woman, the cruel waste of woman! Not all her own fault, either. Oh, I'm not blaming men. They are what circumstance has made them: I think we are all what circumstance has made us. But of all women, think kindest of her who has never known the kiss of lover or child.'

'The loveless woman,' he muttered.

‘ The poor, lonely, loveless woman, who sits with folded hands and tells her heart to be still ; whose breast is aching for love, and who dare not speak of her anguish. Have you thought of this tragedy, Perseus ? ’

‘ I shall think of it,’ he said.

II

THAT afternoon they drove again to the little inn by the Godalming Road.

‘We must have one more day to ourselves,’ she said. ‘To-morrow he will be here.’

Quietly he laughed at her fears. That she should picture the inoffensive J. Smales as a formidable bogey seemed to him highly amusing. What she expected to happen with the advent of that irreproachable one he could not get her to explain. But of one thing he was determined: if the presence of the chauffeur proved even remotely disagreeable he should go at once. Life was too precious now to have even the suspicion of a shadow flung upon it.

The stout landlady with the merry brown eyes greeted them with a broad smile and a commendable courtesy.

‘We have come to take tea in your delightful old garden,’ said Perseus gallantly, ‘if you can oblige us with the same.’

‘To be sure, sir. Will you and madam step this way.’

She led them to the flowered retreat which he and Andromeda remembered so well, and set chairs and a table for them beneath the huge mulberry-tree. The garden was just as fragrant, just as fresh, and just as full of old-fashioned flowers, the perfume from which lay like a sweet, invisible mantle on the air. Perseus took off his hat and threw it upon the grass: Andromeda settled into a low wicker-chair with a sigh of content.

‘I should like to live in this garden always,’ she said.

‘Ah,’ replied the landlady, ‘it’s nice now, but you wouldn’t care for it much in the winter.’

Dear, practical, motherly old soul. Andromeda looked up at her and smiled so sweetly that she grew quite embarrassed. Perseus followed her as she turned towards the house.

‘We will have some of that excellent cake of yours,’ he said; ‘also more of that delicious cress and bread-and-butter. Have you any cherries or strawberries?’

‘Both, sir.’

‘Then bring us both. And oh, by the way, if we could have the garden to ourselves.’ He slipped two or three pieces of silver into her plump hand.

‘You shall, sir; have no fear. I don’t wonder at it either. If I was a man I should want it too.’

‘ You are extremely sympathetic,’ he said.

‘ We ’re all alike, sir, God be praised.’

He returned to Andromeda and threw himself on the grass at her feet.

‘ What have you been doing ? ’ she asked.

‘ Ordering some cherries.’

He caught her hand and began to play with it, impressing a kiss upon the tip of each separate finger, kissing the pink palm, the white wrist.

‘ It is almost gone,’ she said.

‘ Yes.’

There was nothing but the faintest shadow of a bruise, so faint, indeed, that one would scarcely have noticed it. Tenderly he allowed his lips to linger on it.

‘ We will think no more of it,’ she said. ‘ Only pleasant thoughts must be ours in this pleasant place.’

The landlady came bustling along and spread a clean white cloth ; then she brought the fruit—strawberries, firm, clean, fragrant ; cherries, hard and shining, a glorious blend of white and red.

‘ I brought some cream,’ she explained, depositing a shining white jug on the table. ‘ Young ladies are usually fond of strawberries and cream.’

‘ I love strawberries and cream,’ said Andromeda. Perseus, still sprawling at his lady’s feet, his

elbow on her knee, looked up and thanked the thoughtful landlady with a charming smile ; and she, being a woman, was quick to note a personable man. Indeed, she told her husband afterwards that she never set eyes on a handsomer pair. Which was the handsomer she would not like to say, but the man had dreamy eyes that made you feel queer all over.

‘ Don’t you think——’ began Andromeda tentatively--‘ at least while she’s here ?—You look like the man in possession.’

‘ I am.’ He kissed the hem of her skirt, the point of her little shoe. ‘ Odd,’ he mused, ‘ how love makes even the most foolish thing seem feasible, sensible. What appears to the outsider as the rhapsody of a lover is to him the tritest of common-places. I, too, could kiss the ground you walk on, Andromeda, hackneyed as the phrase is, absurd as it sounds.’ Without more ado he lifted her foot and kissed the grass beneath it. Then he looked up at her with a wonderful yearning in his eyes. ‘ It is done ! Behold, I have kissed the ground beneath your feet, and I do not seem to have done an absurd thing, or lost one scrap of dignity. This is love without a doubt, the love that obliterates and rebuilds, and seems to sanctify the meanest act.’

Her eyes were shining into his, but with it all there was a wistfulness of look which had in it much of wonder and of pain.

‘I wish I had met you first,’ she whispered. ‘What a waste of happy years. And there are so few of them.’

At last the landlady came with the tea.

‘I’m sorry,’ she said; ‘I’m afraid I have kept you waiting.’

They both protested that she had done nothing of the kind. She smiled at that swift and emphatic denial, but before taking leave flung a comprehensive glance upon the table.

‘I wonder if I have forgotten anything.’

‘Nothing,’ Andromeda assured her.

‘If you should want anything more——’ she began.

‘I will come for it,’ said Perseus.

Andromeda poured out the tea. The teapot was a flowered monstrosity, evidently the landlady’s best: the cups were to match. Andromeda remembered that on the last occasion tea had been served from a brown earthenware pot with a broken spout.

‘What have you been doing?’ she asked.

‘Buying grace, my dear Andromeda. Bread-and-butter first, and cress?’

‘If you please.’

He helped her to a slice, and selected what he thought the greenest and crispest of the cress. It was all deliciously fresh and crisp, but rare birds must have the best of seed.

No sound save that of the inarticulate babbling of nature reached them. There in that old-world garden they seemed shut away from the stress and struggle of life. In the tree above them the mulberries were ripening gorgeously. When he was not admiring the bewitching red of Andromeda's lips, or the wondrous glow of her eyes, he was counting in an aimless manner the rich fruit of the nearest branch. Indeed, he was conscious of doing many things, thinking many thoughts, which bore no relation to the one thought that in reality had absolute possession of him.

'Oh,' he said, 'but this is beyond all things beautiful.'

'You are not sorry that you found me?'

Her eyes were shining into his, and for answer he drew her closer to him and kissed the heavy, lovely lids. She caught his hand and pressed it passionately to her lips.

'I love you, Perseus.'

Somewhere a bird was fluting in the distance. He heard it with a reeling brain and wondered if it was singing to its mate. Truly his soul was

singing to her, singing the wildest, strangest, most beautiful song that ears had ever heard.

She laughed a low, thrilling, happy laugh as she seized a strawberry and began to prepare it. He took it from her fingers, dipped it in the cream, and then fed her. She held the fruit between her teeth and smiled a challenge at him. He kissed her, biting off his half of the fruit as he did so. Then they both laughed with the delight of the thing.

‘ Let me feed you, Andromeda,’ he said.

‘ Am I not big enough to feed myself ? ’

‘ But I love it.’

‘ So do I.’

Also another game she taught him with the cherries. He was dimly conscious of the fact that she could teach him much, and that he was eager to learn.

‘ You must wish,’ she explained. ‘ Whoever gets the stone will get his wish.’

But as it was between her teeth that the cherry was first placed he never succeeded in securing the stone, though there were other compensations.

‘ You don’t play fair,’ he protested.

‘ Then you try.’

But even then she was successful, for with her eyes so close to his he forgot all about the fruit. She pouted very prettily.

‘I don’t believe you ever played this game before.’

‘I am out of practice,’ he admitted contritely, ‘but I hope to improve. You must teach me, Andromeda. I promise rapid progress.’

While he prepared the strawberries and cream she leaned back in her chair watching him through half-closed lids. She was not dissatisfied with what she saw. The face had many points which appealed to her. The nose was straight, the forehead well developed, the mouth clean-cut and firm. She rather thought that behind the lazy indolence and indifference of his manner there was a latent energy and resource which might be cultivated with profit. Like so many men of his class, he had allowed the best that was in him to lie fallow, hiding beneath that worldly air of nonchalance the true and serious relation of man to life.

As he turned towards her she entirely closed her eyes. He leant forward and kissed them. She looked up smiling.

‘Andromeda,’ he said, ‘you have the loveliest lids in the world.’

‘I am glad you think so: I want you to think so. I want you to love me as woman was never loved before.’

‘But I do.’

‘ Just think of it, Perseus, just think of all the men and women who have been lovers ! Why, even now the world is full of them.’

‘ Not lovers like us — there could never be lovers like us. The world is not large enough for them.’

‘ I like to think of old lovers,’ she mused, ‘ of the women of long ago, the dear dead women of the forgotten centuries. Strange, too, is it not, that out of all the years the only women who come down to us, the only women in whom we take any real delight, are the great dead lovers ? Strange, too, how time so mellows their wrong-doing that it seems to shine their one redeeming glory. Helen, Cleopatra, Mary Stuart. Strange that the national heroine of the dour, religious Scots should be a wanton, and their national hero a drunken poet ! Should we have known Guinevere had she been a true wife ? Singular commentary on the pretentiousness of life, proving beyond doubt that the laws of nature and the laws of man must always be antagonistic. Sometimes I think I could have been a great lover. Those women lived who swayed the rulers of the world, whose frown made kings and nations tremble.

“ Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium ? ”

Think of it, Perseus—the world in arms for a woman's face. And now !'

She shrugged her shoulders with disdain, but there was a smouldering fire in her eyes which might have set ablaze those 'topless towers.'

'I think the times are not so greatly changed as you seem to imagine,' he said. 'Do you suppose woman's influence in the world is any the less because she does not seem to flaunt it? Kings still rule the greater portion of the earth, and women still rule kings either as wife or mistress. Her influence has never waned: I think it never will. There is more power wielded by woman, even in these days, than the ordinary man imagines. Indeed, is not all the power in her? Petticoat influence, my dear Andromeda, has never failed to move the world since Eve took that first bite at the apple.'

She smiled languidly into his eyes.

'You are exceedingly wise, Perseus, for you realise the limitations of your sex. Yet somehow the romance of the thing seems dead.'

'The centuries will restore it. The vulgar incidents of to-day become the romances of to-morrow. Time mellows gloriously as you suggested. And after all, they are dead lovers, Andromeda, while we are alive.'

‘ Yes,’ she admitted, ‘ it is something to be alive. Yet, if there is any truth in things unknown, how much more perfect must be the reunion after death, when all love shall become perfect, unchangeable. I should like to believe it all : I wish I could. One should be strong in faith ; but what if one is by nature doubting, sceptical ? ’ Her voice took a low, musical sound ; her eyes were dreamily staring into the blue infinitude. ‘ Have you ever wondered where heaven is ? ’

‘ My dear Andromeda ! ’ he answered with a start.

‘ I often think of it, but I can’t fix it. Of course once we thought it was somewhere in the clouds ; but what we call the sky science tells us is an infinity of worlds. If such is the case heaven cannot be there any more than it is here with us. Where is it then ? ’

‘ I don’t know.’

‘ And hell ! Once I thought it was away down somewhere in the middle of the earth. Where is hell, Perseus ? ’

‘ For many it is here on earth.’

‘ That ’s a quibble. I mean the hell of fire and brimstone, the hell of the Christian, the hate that never ceases. Once I feared such hatred : now I despise it. The Roman Catholics have their

purgatory, a sort of cleansing-house of venial sin. If heaven is above the clouds, and hell beneath the earth, where is purgatory? These places, if they exist, must be somewhere. Tell me, Perseus, what do you think of it all?'

'I have thought of it until my brain has grown weary, but I cannot fathom it. I am ignorant as a little child.'

'And I babble nonsense unceasingly? Yet why should it be nonsense?'

'Why should it be nonsense? When the intelligent child puts a too pertinent question we check it with the cry of "silliness."'

'I think you understand me,' she whispered.

He liked these speculative moods in her. They seemed to lift her into regions that no other woman of his acquaintance had ever trodden. Behind the mocking laughter of her eyes was a more serious purpose. She was a dreamer of strange and wonderful dreams, and in a way he felt that he was infinitely little. Cleopatra, Helen, Mary Stuart, must have possessed some grace beyond that of the merely beautiful body. Many women have beautiful bodies, but men do not destroy worlds for them.

It was with a chastened spirit, with a feeling almost of awe, that he took her hand and kissed it. Perhaps she realised something of what was running

in his mind, for with an exquisitely tender movement she flung her free arm round his neck and drew his face in against her breast.

‘Helen could not have loved Paris more than Andromeda loves Perseus,’ she whispered.

‘Nor could Paris have loved Helen so much as Perseus loves Andromeda.’

‘Then why should we envy even the gods.’

‘I don’t,’ he said. ‘I rather think the gods must envy us.’

III

Just before dinner Ganymedes entered softly and announced that Mr. Smales was waiting below. Perseus looked at Andromeda and smiled.

‘All right. Tell him I’ll come to him in a minute.’

‘But why not see him here?’ she interposed.

‘Don’t you mind?’

‘Not in the least.’

‘Very well, George: bring him along.’

‘Why did you hesitate like that?’ she asked as soon as the rusty one had slopped off.

‘I was thinking of you.’

‘And so giving that wicked old waiter cause for suspicion. Don’t you think he’s a very discreditable-looking person?’

‘I have no doubt whatever that he is a perambulating mass of corruption. But, Andromeda——’

‘Oh, I’m not afraid to meet J. Smales,’ she answered, laughing.

‘Of course not; but you seem to think——’

‘ We ’re going to be good friends, he and I, you see if we ’re not.’

‘ Well, he really is an invaluable chap.’

‘ Ah, I knew you were only waiting for the chance to praise him. Like master, like man. We are going to be good friends, J. Smales and I.’

‘ If you say so, that end is already achieved.’

At that moment a low knock was heard at the door, and as a reply to Vermont’s ‘ come in,’ the door opened slowly and Ixion appeared on the threshold.

‘ Come in, Smales,’ cried Vermont cheerily. ‘ Enjoy yourself in London ? ’

‘ Yes, sir : that is—except for——’

‘ I quite understand. Pity you let that distress you, as I was in no hurry.’

‘ The manufacturers, sir ; there’s no doing anything with them.’

He advanced a couple of paces into the room and then came to a standstill, his large, round eyes surreptitiously peeping past his master to the other occupant of the room.

‘ Well, I suppose it ’s all right now ? ’

‘ Yes, sir. I brought the wheel down with me. We shall be ready to-morrow.’

‘ Ah, well, don’t hurry. See that you make a good job of it. You remember my cousin, John ? ’

He bowed towards Andromeda, who advanced smiling. 'I am trying to persuade her to travel with us.'

'Yes, sir.'

'But I'm sure you don't remember me, John,' she said.

'I think so, my lady. It was you who came a cropper on the hill?'

'Yes, an awful cropper.'

J. Smales did not realise the inner meaning of those words, but his round eyes opened sympathetically.

'I hope your ladyship is feeling quite well now?' he inquired solicitously.

'Never better in my life, thank you. Will you have a glass of wine?'

'Do, John,' insisted Perseus, who noticed the hesitation in John's manner.

'Thank you, my lady: thank you, sir.'

With her own hands Andromeda poured it out and brought it to him. He drank as one in a dream, for she had dazzled him with her smile.

'I have kept your room on,' said Vermont. 'You must forage round for your own grub.'

'Yes, sir. Shall you want me any more to-night?'

'Not to-night, John. I will look you up at the garage in the morning.'

Smales backed towards the door and took his departure, his eyes glued to Andromeda's face.

'Well?' inquired Perseus.

'He's a dear fellow,' she said. 'He has lovely eyes—just like a sheep's.'

Perseus roared. 'Andromeda, you have conquered both master and man.'

'I told you we should be good friends,' she said.

J. Smales, in the meantime, was slowly groping his way downstairs, a succession of strange thoughts beating their way with difficulty through his slow brain. Expecting to find the 'guv'nor' in an evil humour on account of the delay, he had looked forward with some trepidation to a bad quarter of an hour. Therefore his pleasure was not greater than his surprise at the extreme cordiality of the reception. At the same time his brow was wrinkled with perplexity. Certainly he had never seen anything more beautiful than this so strangely found cousin, and he tried hard to discover when and where he had seen her before. For two years now he had been driving for Mr. Vermont, during which period he had at various times come in contact with most of his employer's friends and relations, the latter of whom were happily very few; but he could not recollect having seen this lady before. Had he done so he could not possibly have forgotten her.

During his stay in London he had scarcely done more than give her a thought. Certainly he had not expected to find her in Guildford on his return. And then his thoughts suddenly flew along another groove, and one which almost frightened him. Was this the cause of the gov'nor's good-humour, was this the reason why he bore delay with such cheerful indifference? J. Smales may have had sheep-like eyes, as Andromeda said, but into them came a sudden gleam of intelligence which, had she seen, might have startled her considerably.

George was waiting for him in the passage which led to the yard, and his ruddy face betrayed an oleaginous solicitude which invited confidence. He had a bald head of unimpeachable reverence, and grey hair which, if it did not, should have commanded respect. Also he had a soft, inviting way with him which had been known to succeed with the less sophisticated.

‘ Did he row you ? ’ he asked sympathetically.

‘ Row me ! no. Why should he ? ’

‘ I really didn't suppose he would ; but you 'ave been in London a long time.’

‘ Couldn't get the order delivered,’ explained Ixion, who suddenly found himself wondering why he took the trouble to explain at all.

‘ No 'urry,’ whispered George, looking exceedingly

knowing. 'I wouldn't 'urry neither, not me,' and he leered in a way which was not becoming in a man of his years, and which robbed even his bald head of its last vestige of reverence. 'Me and Miss Short believe that they 're really on their 'oney-moon.'

'Oh, do you,' said Ixion curtly. 'An' who the dooce is Miss Short when she 's at home?'

'That 's 'er with the red 'air. She 's in the bar now. You 'aven't seen 'er?'

'Nor don't want to,' said Smales.

'Oh, she 's a bit out of your class,' replied George consolingly. 'Brother a clergyman up in London, father a rural dean in Norfolk.'

'What 's her bloomin' mother?' asked Ixion sourly.

'A angel,' said George. 'She 's class. Red 'air, too. No flies on red 'air. 'E 's a nice gent though, your guv'nor. I like 'im.'

'Jolly kind of you.'

'Mr. Carey Vermont,' continued the insinuating Ganymedes, 'an' Miss Carey Vermont. But she calls 'im Percyhus.'

'Well, can't she call him that if she likes?'

'Ye-es. Come an' 'ave a drain.'

'No, thanks. I 'm just off to the garage.'

' 'E calls 'er Dromedary,' continued the voice in

the same sing-song, insinuating tone. 'That's a rum name now.'

'Very appropriate when you're about.'

'Why?'

'It suggests the 'ump,' snapped Smales.

But as he walked round to the garage his mind was full of strange conjectures. Miss Carey Vermont! To his knowledge there was no such person in existence. True, there might be, but if so it was strange that he had neither seen nor heard of her. Was this the reason of that sudden generosity which made light of delay, which found in so serious an accident a blessing in disguise? This thought brought a rush of other thoughts, of which the worthy Smales was not a little afraid. There was that strange meeting on the hill-top to be accounted for, and the story of the wrecked bicycle. He remembered now that he had seen no trace of that wreckage. Also his mind wandered to a slim, pale girl whom he more than half believed might one day consent to become Mrs. Carey Vermont. What would happen now? What had happened during his stay in London?

Smales, being a highly respectable young man, resented strongly the imputations of George the waiter. He liked neither the manner nor the tone of that hoary individual; and as for the red-headed

Miss Short, it seemed to him that she would have been much better employed looking after her beer taps than in talking scandal of her betters. It is true, Mr. Vermont may not have been a saint, but hitherto he had conducted his little affairs with the most commendable punctiliousness. A gentleman can do no more.

The next morning she accompanied Perseus on his visit to the garage. Smales had already been at work for something like three or four hours, and the job was rapidly approaching completion.

‘ I think I shall be able to test her before lunch,’ he said, in answer to Vermont’s inquiries.

‘ And shall we be ready to go for a spin this afternoon ? ’ Andromeda asked.

‘ What do you say, John ? ’

‘ Certainly, sir.’

But John was looking up at her with his smutty face, and she smiled at the comicality of his appearance. If he saw the smile it occasioned him no concern, or at least not half so much as her surpassing daintiness. Again he thought of that slim, pale girl in London.

Andromeda declared that Smales was the prince of chauffeurs. The red and gold beauty, her strength restored, carried them to all points of the compass. Highway and byway they explored in

her, and Smales was never again guilty of slipping the clutch in too quickly. Careful where care was required, dashing when told to let her go, he proved himself an ideal driver, and valuable in many other ways. It's true his great round eyes were always full of wonder when he looked at Andromeda, but the nature of that wonder she was never able properly to analyse. Nor did it concern her greatly, and after a little while even Perseus thought less of the singularity of the situation.

But the hotel began to pall on them both, and during one of their excursions in the neighbourhood of Frensham, in a quiet backwater of the world, as it seemed, deliverance presented itself in the shape of a thatched cottage, across the front of which the Virginia creeper was already beginning to redden. It stood back some hundred yards or so from the road, and was approached by a well-worn track through the grass. Behind it rose a small, thickly-wooded hill, and behind this again, though this they could not see at the moment, was a wild spread of common land purple with heather.

Andromeda called upon Smales to stop the car, and she and Perseus, having alighted, walked slowly through the grass to the cottage.

'The very place,' she whispered as she clung to his arm. 'A month of this, Perseus, and——'

‘ Well ? ’

‘ I could be very happy here with you,’ she said.

‘ For a month ? ’

‘ Well, we are not bound to stay on for ever. What ducky windows ! ’ she cried. They were diamond paned, leaded, and the tiny curtains were white as snow. Geraniums flourished in red pots on the window-sills, and in the wee front garden.

In answer to his knock a grey-haired, rosy-cheeked, active-looking woman appeared, evidently not a little surprised to see such visitors. She looked past them to the red car by the roadside, which was softly humming like a gorgeous summer fly.

Perseus quickly introduced himself and his business. His wife and he were looking for a spot in which they could spend a quiet month. Was the cottage to be let ? The old lady, who had shrewd eyes, hesitated. Then he asked her to name her terms. Rather nervously she suggested five pounds. He offered her ten. After that negotiations proceeded most equitably.

To be sure, the place had its drawbacks, but Andromeda professed to be delighted. It was so sweet, so fresh, so quaint. Certain articles of furniture would have to be sent from Guildford ; but when one makes up one’s mind to be pleased, there are very few obstacles which cannot be over-

come. For a further consideration the old lady agreed to cook and tidy up for them.

Andromeda was enraptured.

‘We are going to live here, John,’ she said as they returned to the car.

‘Indeed,’ said he.

What was to be the next piece of folly?

IV

FOR the next two days Smales was kept busy running between the cottage and Guildford with the articles of furniture which Andromeda deemed necessary for comfort. Then on the morning of the third day they packed up their baggage and left the hotel for good. George bustled with unwonted activity and was duly rewarded: Miss Short was most affable to Perseus when he went to pay the bill. She had seen little of him, it is true, but that was not because she wished it. She expressed the hope that his stay in Guildford had been pleasant. He replied, unthinkingly, that it had been extremely so, nor did he quite realise the nature of his answer until he saw the smile creep round her mouth. Really the ladies of Guildford were quite humorous, and sympathetic, no doubt, to the lonely wayfarer.

‘Now, John,’ said he, when they were finally installed in the cottage, acting on a previous suggestion of Andromeda, ‘I am determined that you shall have that month’s holiday at last. Take the

car over to Farnham and leave her there. You will bring her back this day month, unless you hear from me to the contrary. For the rest, you don't know where I am, and you don't care.'

'And what if I do, sir?'

'Well, just tell yourself that it's no concern of yours.'

'I suppose it's no good my speaking, sir?'

'Not the least. I might possibly regard it as an impertinence. At the same time I don't mind telling you, if it is likely to prove a salve to your conscience, that presently I intend to marry this lady; so you must understand, once and for all, that I shall tolerate no shadow of incivility, or suspicion of disrespect. If the terms do not clash with your conscience, you may consider yourself as remaining in my employ; if they do, I have no wish to hold you against your will.'

'It's not that, sir, thanks for the confidence.'

'Then the rest does not concern you, and I am afraid I cannot listen.'

At that moment Andromeda called to him through the open window, and Smales turned slowly away with a hanging head. He had not looked round, for fear of meeting her mocking smile; for he, too, was human, and when his eyes met hers he felt his courage evaporate. Though apparently the best

of friends, there was an antagonism between them of which they were both secretly aware, and her endeavours to placate him had met with but indifferent success. His imagination was not capable of rising to the heights of secrecy. The fiction of the cousin had long since departed from him, and the mystery was not an adequate substitute. He did not like mysteries which presaged trouble, and trouble he foresaw.

In obedience to her call Perseus re-entered the cottage. Her sleeves were tucked up, for she had been working hard with Mrs. Selton, the rosy-cheeked landlady, and the exertion had brought a delightful flush to her face, a rare sparkle to her eyes.

‘ You have got rid of him ? ’

‘ Yes, he is going at once.’

‘ I shall have you all to myself ? ’

‘ All to yourself,’ he laughed.

‘ Then come and look at our home.’

There were only three rooms in the cottage, sitting-room, bedroom and kitchen, but wonders had been worked within the last hour, graceful feminine touches which even wrung unstinted praise from Mrs. Selton, who had hitherto regarded her habitation as beyond improvement. Perseus expressed the keenest delight with what he saw, and Andro-

meda chattered like a child with a new toy. She took him by the hand and led him from room to room.

‘Isn’t it a duck of a kitchen!’ she cried. He thought it looked rather poverty-stricken, but did not say so. ‘I shall be able quite easily to boil the chocolate and the eggs for supper when the old lady has gone.’ (It was agreed that Mrs. Selton, who had a married son in the adjacent village, should sleep at his house.) ‘Everything is so convenient, you see.’ He did not see it, but no matter. ‘And isn’t it a quaint chimney?’

Too quaint, he thought, for comfort, suggesting a plentiful supply of smoke in a south-west wind.

‘A bit chilly this floor?’ he suggested timidly. The floor was of baked clay worn smooth and hard as marble.

‘Oh, I shall put down a mat,’ she said. ‘Besides, this is summer. We shall be gone before the cold weather comes.’

‘Where, Andromeda?’

‘Goodness knows. But we have a month before us. I’m going to be happy—for a month.’

They stood at the door of the bedroom and looked in. It was all white and fragrant, sweet with the odour of fresh plucked flowers. She looked up at

him, a look full of timid, wonderful joy. He caught her in his arms and kissed her fiercely.

‘Be my wife, Andromeda,’ he whispered.

‘H’sh, stupid. What if she should hear you! I am your wife—the best kind of wife—one whom you can get rid of when you ’re tired.’

‘But I don’t want to get rid of you, and I shall never tire.’

‘Be content.’

‘I cannot be content until I hold you legally.’

‘Do you expect to hold a woman that way? Isn’t it better to hold her like this?’ She put up her lips and kissed him. ‘Don’t be silly, there’s a good boy. We’re going to be very happy.’

His arm was still about her as they entered the sitting-room. The landlady, who was kneeling before the fireplace, rose to greet them.

‘Just setting the fire, dearie,’ she explained, ‘in case you should feel a bit chilly towards the evening. I know what ’usbands are,’ she added with a sagacious wag of the head, ‘especially after they’ve been out all day. My old man used to get that fidgety at nights that I never knew what to do with him.’

‘My old man never gets fidgety,’ laughed Andromeda.

‘ You ’re lucky. ’Usbands as a rule are a sore, sad trial to us pore women.’

‘ They are,’ assented Andromeda ; ‘ but I know how to keep mine in a good-humour.’

‘ Well, if Selton were alive I ’d ask for the receipt, but it ’s no good to me now, as ’e ’s been dead these fifteen years. ’E was a terrible troublesome man.’

‘ They all are,’ laughed the young woman gaily. ‘ We have just got to do the best we can with a bad bargain.’

‘ All the same,’ said the old lady seriously, ‘ if you wouldn’t mind I should like to ’ave that receipt.’

Andromeda laughed so heartily that Perseus could not refrain from joining in.

‘ But don’t you know it ? ’

‘ Should I be asking if I did ? ’

‘ But you ’re not thinking of doing it again ? ’ she asked in an awed whisper.

‘ Why not ? ’ inquired the old lady somewhat sharply.

‘ Why not, indeed ? ’ said Perseus gravely.

‘ Of course, why not ? But you should not want the receipt from me. I am only a beginner.’

‘ I ’ve known some beginners as could teach the oldsters a bit—what do ’ee say, sir ? ’

‘ The inscrutable wisdom of Providence has endowed woman with a superabundance of strategy.’

‘What do ’ee mean by that?’

‘Merely that a man isn’t in it with a woman.’

‘I dunno. Selton was good enough in his way, though ’e wasn’t by no means perfect; but if I ever take on a second—an’ there’s more than one ’as ’is eyes on this bit o’ cottage—I’ll take care ’e don’t run quite as free as Selton.’

‘It seems to me that I was right after all,’ said Andromeda; ‘and if my husband takes to carrying on I shall certainly come to you for advice.’

‘You ’ll ’old ’im right enough,’ replied the old lady, ‘while you ’ve got that pretty face. Men are like chickens: they know where to find the best seed.’

Smales came to the door for his final instructions, looking anything but delighted at the thought of his long holiday. As his eyes met those of Andromeda they hardened perceptibly, causing her to laugh softly to herself.

‘John is jealous,’ she murmured, and then laughed again.

The instructions were but a brief repetition of what had gone before. Smales looked as though he would like to speak, as though he wished Vermont would speak.

‘I hope you ’ll have a nice holiday, John,’ said Andromeda.

‘ Thank you, miss—the same to you.’

She looked sharply round, but luckily no one was near. Perseus frowned ominously. Smales’s weak mouth grew obstinate.

‘ That will do,’ said Vermont coldly. ‘ You may go now.’

Smales saluted and walked slowly back to the car. From the gate they watched him mount it and drive away.

‘ Did you hear that ? ’ she asked sharply.

‘ It was a slip—a mistake.’

‘ Oh no, it wasn’t. If you are going to let your servants insult me——’ She turned aside, head up, chin out. Quickly he caught her by the hand.

‘ He would not dare ! It was his stupidity.’

‘ I suppose I ought not to be ready to take offence. What can I expect ? ’

Her mouth was quivering, her eyes flashing, her body stiff, unyielding. For the first time he saw that in her eyes which did not please him.

‘ You are wrong, my dear,’ he said soothingly ; ‘ the fellow is merely a dunderhead.’

‘ Not such a dunderhead as you imagine. I knew I should hate him, and I do.’

She turned sharply and re-entered the cottage. He did not call her back, some intuitive knowledge warning him that it would be wiser to leave her

alone. But he walked slowly to the gate, leaning upon which he stared thoughtfully out across the road.

It was the first little cloud, and his face grew troubled.

V

BUT she was not the one to brood over wrongs, real or imaginary. That fortitude which had carried her through so much was not likely to give way in the face of trivialities. Presently she called him to admire her rearrangement of their household gods, and her eyes were full of sweet repentance.

‘I felt it,’ she confessed humbly, ‘but I feel it no more. Do you forgive me?’

‘My dear, I am only sorry that his inadvertence should have caused you the least concern.’

She pressed her hand to his mouth. He kissed it tenderly.

‘There, there, say no more about it. What do you think of our new home? We are going to be very happy, Perseus.’

‘Very happy.’

Summer most glorious continued to hold undisputed sway over the land. It was a wonderful season, the kind of season that makes England the flower-garden of the world. Nature showered her blessings with unexampled prodigality: no sus-

picion of a shadow came to cloud the clear way of existence. There were near at hand a hundred pleasant places : each day they discovered some fresh surprise. The world and all that belonged to it seemed so far away that they never even caught the echo of its roaring. It was as though they had moored their boat in a forgotten backwater of life, and the great stream of the world rolled on, as oblivious of them as they of it.

Andromeda had made up her mind to be happy, and to ensure that happiness she let no opportunity escape. Day after day she planned little excursions in the woods, or among the heathlands. Sometimes they took their luncheon with them, and lay for hours in the sunshine among the sweet-smelling clover, the bees humming soft music to the flowers. Sometimes they penetrated into undiscovered places, and took tea in quaint, old-fashioned inns with sanded floors. Mentally or physically she never seemed to tire. Of all women in the world she was to him the most wonderful. The variety of her seemed inexhaustible. Her moods were as variable as the light clouds which cross a blue sky, yet, like the sky itself, she was steadfast behind it all.

The world was all theirs. Rarely were those journeyings interrupted by the advent of strangers. Sometimes a wanderer espied the lovers and passed

on : occasionally in the distance they traced the dusty course of a flying motor. Hour after hour she would lie in his arms on the slope of some green hill, or amid the thick, sweet-smelling grasses, unseen except by the sun, unheeded except by the wind. And her eyes told him always the same sweet tale, and her lips were sweeter than clover. She seemed insatiable of love. The tale ten times told lost nothing in the retelling : ten times again was it retold and listened to as eagerly.

‘ Keep on telling me,’ she would say, ‘ and never cease your kissings. I think all the joy and wisdom of the world is on your lips. And hold me close, so close that I can scarcely breathe. It is madness to feel you almost press the life out of me. I should like to die thus, your arms about me, your lips to mine, your eyes telling me the secret of your soul. I am jealous of your hands when they are not touching me : I am jealous almost of the wind that comes between us. How did I ever live before I met you ? But did I ? What beautiful eyes you have, Perseus. Don’t drink, or dissipate, or do anything to spoil them. And you have been kind to women—kinder than they are to themselves. Poor women, they do make a dreadful hash of things. But we have only ourselves and our love, and when we give that we give all.’

‘ You do not regret ? ’

‘ I—no ! What have I to regret ? I read life in my own way, dear Perseus, not as others would have me read it, and if it brings happiness to me, how have I misread ? ’

‘ And you are happy ? ’

‘ Can you doubt it ? ’

‘ Yet I confess with shame that there are times when the Philistine will not be denied.’

‘ Then deny him, starve him, let him die of thirst. Or worse still, deny him those joys which, witnessed in others, turn him green with envy. Your Philistine is still a man, Perseus dear, and the man must conquer. But we, we are the children of an older day, or a day that is not yet born. Frankly, I glory in your beauty as you in mine. You are so strong, my Perseus : you could kill me with one of those big hands of yours, and yet your touch thrills me most exquisitely.’

‘ You are exquisite,’ he said, burying his face in her neck. She laughed lightly as she played with his hair.

‘ I think we are both mad, yet what a delicious madness ! I would not change it for all the cold, calculating sanity of the world.’

‘ Nor I,’ he whispered as he kissed her dainty ear. ‘ I love you, Andromeda.’

She flung her arms around his neck and pressed his face close in against her breast.

‘Can you hear my heart beating?’ she asked.

Almost it seemed to him that it beat articulately, like the faint, low, mystic music that one hears in a dream.

‘Every beat is for you,’ she murmured, ‘every nerve, every pulse throbs only in the exquisite joy that you create. When I close my eyes I seem to float away into a world of sweet sounds and pleasant, indistinct images. I am taken up and carried through the air, and the sound of rushing winds charms me almost to insensibility.’ She slipped from his arms and buried her face deep in the grass. ‘What magic is in this good brown earth,’ she whispered, ‘that makes all things grow, even love? The smell of it is like a delicious intoxicant. What wonder that all things flourish on its bosom nourished by so fond a lover. I understand now why the ancients called it Mother. It is the mother-breast that nourishes all.’

She lay flat along the earth, and extending her arms seemed to gather it in a close embrace. He stooped over her, and where her white neck showed below the hair he pressed his lips. She partly turned, and pulling the long grass over her eyes looked at him through green lashes.

‘Kiss me, Perseus. Did I not tell you that I had

the makings of a great lover ! I too might have been of them in other times. I live in them, through them, realise each tiny heart-beat, feel each great throb of the soul. Oh, my Mother, how sweet you are !' And again she buried her face close in against the earth, and he saw her lips move in exhortation or prayer.

' But not so sweet as you, her daughter,' he whispered.

' Yes, I am a daughter of Earth,' she said, ' loved of her, loving her, nourished at her breast, into which I shall presently sink to sleep. It will be a long sleep, Perseus, but she is beautiful and gracious, and will be kind. . . . How warm the sun is, how deliciously warm ! It seems to lave my limbs, to permeate me, as it were, and draw the sweetness out of the earth beneath. I wonder why lying in the grass makes one feel so affectionate ? . . . To-day clothes seem a hideous outrage on nature. One should be naked to the sun and the wind and the soft caresses of the clover. . . . I love to lie like this, out in the open. It seems to take one back to the beginning of things, the days that knew not the sin and the shame of living. Oh yes, I'm a pagan, a frank, unregenerate pagan. When I was a child I used to run barefooted. Have you ever run barefooted, Perseus ? '

‘ Never—except by the sea.’

‘ Ah, but that ’s convention again. Shall we ? ’
She looked up at him, a daring challenge in her eyes.

‘ Why not ? ’

Quick as thought she set to work, and in a twinkling her feet were bare.

‘ What lovely little feet you have, Andromeda.’

Deep into the clover she buried her pink toes.

‘ It ’s so soft and cool,’ she said. ‘ I wonder why we are forced to wear shoes and stockings ? ’ He suggested convenience for one thing : then there were climatic conditions which did not favour the idea. ‘ Oh, Perseus,’ she moaned, ‘ you will ruin everything.’

‘ If I only had feet like yours,’ he said, ‘ I might be tempted.’

She drew them up under her skirt, her mouth pouting prettily.

‘ If you are going to make such remarks I shall put on my shoes again.’

‘ Please don’t,’ he protested. ‘ They are so pretty.’

Gradually they stole out again from beneath the hem of the skirt, and quick as thought he seized them, stooped down and kissed them.

Just then a lark rose somewhere from amid the neighbouring heather, and circling upward, poured forth a ringing peal of joyousness. They both

watched it intently until it was swallowed up in the infinite. Then she looked at him and her eyes softened, shining bright with a sudden emotion. He drew her to him and kissed her silently, passionately.

‘ Yes,’ she said, ‘ but it must all end sometime.’

‘ All things must end sometime.’

‘ But this quicker than others.’

‘ Why should it ? ’

‘ Because it is not good that mortals should be too happy.’

‘ Infamous doctrine of fanatic pietism ! ’

‘ I believe there are those who still wear hair-shirts and otherwise mortify the flesh. That is Christianity in its maddest and most sickly aspect. The old pagans adored it : who were the wiser ? But perhaps they hadn’t souls to save. I wonder ? ’

He did not answer, for it suddenly came to him that something might even be said for the rigid Christian, though on the whole he would rather not enter into that profitless discussion. In many ways he was a child of his generation, one of the many who come from the public schools and universities, trained to a nicety, no doubt, yet brought into line with the regularity of garden produce. A woman was needed to work the revolution—she always is—and he found in her what Adam found in his

partner Eve. Odd, too, that the greater moral strength should be found in the weaker vessel! Woman is at heart the true revolutionary. Even the shrine of fashion must be newly decked every season or she will no longer worship at it.

She swung off again with her usual inconsequence.

‘Strange how little one can really learn from books, though they embrace the wisdom of the ages. I used to read a lot once—heavy stuff too! Yet Mrs. Selton knows as much of the future as the wisest of them. I suppose it all depends on the peculiar intellectual attitude. Of course, one body of men have merely to support a proposition for another body of men, equally as wise, no doubt, to rise up and destroy it. But surely there is finality somewhere, a truth that, like the diamond in the earth, is waiting to be discovered? We talk of the infinite, but do we quite grasp what it means?’ She looked up at him with smiling lips. ‘How I chatter to be sure, and I have not even yet grasped the mysteries of the Trinity.’

‘Who are you, Andromeda?’ he said. There was much solid perturbation in his eyes.

‘Who am I? Just a blundering mortal who cannot see ahead, one who at times goes down on her hands and knees to grope.’

‘I must know more of you,’ he insisted doggedly ;

‘I must have all your confidence. The time has passed for make-believe. At times you almost seem like a phantom lover. You have grown too dear for even a doubt to linger between us. I must know who and what you are.’

‘If that would profit you I should not hesitate. Be content. You have made life very sweet to me, brought out my better nature. That seems rather strange, doesn’t it,’ and the mocking mouth curled curiously: ‘yet it is perfectly true. I dread to dispel the charm. Perhaps you think it strange that I should dread anything.’ He protested vigorously. ‘No, no. I know how good you are. Frankly, I never expected to meet with such delicacy. Let us be happy together a little while longer. Presently you shall know all.’

‘Do you mean that my knowing all will destroy that happiness?’

‘Who can say? Do you know, in spite of all, I think you are only half a pagan. Why even I myself can be puritanical at times. It’s in us, in our island blood, whether we like it or not. It is that which makes us so different from the rest of Europe. Not understanding they call us hypocrites. At any rate, we two can free ourselves of that charge.’

But there was a plaintiveness in her whimsicality

which did not escape him, a suggestion as of something deeper behind the sunniness of her smile. Occasionally, when she forgot his presence, he caught that look intensified, and it caused him no inconsiderable alarm. Guessing only what she was and had been, conjecture at times played him fantastic tricks. Though obsessed, as it were, by love of her, that obsession still had its limits—as must always be the case with a man—and at varied intervals much serious thought would not be denied. Much as he credited woman with the resources of imagination, also he knew that her pretence was not boundless ; and when he caught sudden glimpses of that plaintive expression he feared that memory was at work.

Who was she, what was she ? Was she much wronged or much wronging : a woman to be cherished or spurned ? To him she was a delightful enigma, a phantasm almost, a dream come true. Perhaps not so much of a riddle as he liked to think ; yet one, the solution of which he almost dreaded even while he strove to know it.

VI

THERE was a rough, winding pathway at the back of the cottage by which they could enter without going round to the front door, and this they almost invariably used when setting out or returning from their little journeyings.

One day, a fortnight after they had been installed at the cottage, Vermont, returning alone, having left Andromeda sleeping amid the clover in the sunshine, was surprised to see Mrs. Selton standing in the doorway beckoning violently to him. Approaching closer he saw that the poor lady was in a state of much agitation. Her lips were moving rapidly, but apparently inarticulately, and much of her rosiness had flown.

‘What is it?’ he asked, coming up: ‘what has happened?’

‘Something dreadful, sir: awful motor accident. The poor gentleman is inside.’

Not waiting to hear more, he rushed into the little sitting-room and beheld a man lying on the couch. Over him hung a person in the dress of a

chauffeur, while a third person, an unmistakable farm hand, gazed with some concern from his position near the window. At Vermont's entrance the chauffeur looked round.

‘What has happened?’

‘Collision,’ said the man.

‘Is he much hurt?’

‘I hope not, sir.’

‘No, I’m not hurt,’ cried a voice from the sofa, a voice full of peevishness and irritability. ‘It was your damned stupidity, or the stupidity of that thick-headed yokel, I don’t know which.’

The yokel maintained an attitude of supreme impassivity, but the chauffeur flushed.

‘I don’t think it was my fault, Sir Digby.’

‘What does it matter whose fault it was! I might have broken my damned neck. What’s happened to the car?’

‘Rather badly damaged, sir.’

‘Pitched me clean out, didn’t it? The fool was right across the road?’

‘Yes, Sir Digby.’

‘Umph! Well, where’s the master of this delectable mansion?’

Vermont advanced.

‘How de do, Brenton?’

The man looked up, a puzzled expression on his

face. He was not old nor was he young, but his face, which was heavy and square like a bulldog's, bore on it unmistakable traces of evil living. The eyes, of a pale, cold blue, were narrow and clotted with veins.

'Who are you?' he asked.

'Don't you remember me—Vermont?'

'Vermont—Vermont!' He seemed to roll the name round his memory as he did about his tongue.

'Not Carey Vermont?'

'The same.'

'Why, it's years since we saw each other?'

'Years. But how are you getting on? Are you sure you're not hurt?'

'Quite. Just a shaking. I shall be all right presently. Have you any whisky-and-soda in the house?'

'Yes.'

'Then like a good fellow, Vermont—if you love me.'

Vermont was not sure that he loved him: nevertheless he bustled to prepare the drink, muttering to himself. 'Brenton—Digby Brenton. Good Lord!' They had been at school together these two: as a matter of fact, Vermont had fagged for him at Eton, and still remembered sundry spontaneous bootings. It had always been a blow first

with Brenton. 'Mad Brenton' he was called as a boy, and the appellation stuck to him through life. If rumour were to be credited he had done his best to sustain his early reputation.

He drank the whisky-and-soda with much relish, seeming to gain strength thereby. Then he looked round the room with a quizzing smile.

'Is this your crib?'

'For the time being.'

'What a God-forsaken spot! But if I remember, you always cultivated solitude and the muses. Still at it?'

'The muses and I have long since parted company.'

He smiled, and again his glance wandered round the room, resting curiously on the newly cut flowers and some of Andromeda's nicknacks.

'Looks like a woman. Have you one here? But of course you have. No man could stick this without a woman.'

'My wife is here with me.'

'Congratulations.' But the remark was singularly devoid of enthusiasm. Then he addressed the chauffeur. 'Get the wreckage away and make the best you can of it. I suppose there is civilisation somewhere near this wilderness?' He was addressing the yokel now, who stared back at him with

wide, unintellectual eyes. 'I suppose one can get a fly, or something of that sort?'

'Yes, sur,' said the man.

'And look you, my friend, you mustn't think that though you live in the neighbourhood the road belongs to you. You've smashed my car and damned near killed me. What do you think of that?'

'It was you,' replied the man sourly, 'in that stink-pot of yours. You come round the bend like a flash of lightning. I couldn't escape 'ee nohow. An' maybe as that 'oss of mine won't be fit for work no more.'

Brenton waved an impatient hand.

'Take the fellow away, Smithers, and hear what he has to say. Curse him for a blundering dolt. He tires me with his vacant stare.'

He lay back and closed his eyes. Smithers, who seemed thoroughly to understand his master, flung a conciliatory look towards the yokel, touched him lightly on the arm, and together they quitted the room.

'Sorry to hear of the spill,' said Vermont perfunctorily. 'Hope the car is not much damaged?'

'My dear fellow,' replied the other, 'for weeks now I've been trying to break my neck, but the devil seems to look after his own. What has quite

happened to the car I don't know. It was like a flash. We came whizzing round the corner and struck that fool, who was in the middle of the road. I remember flying like a rocket through the air, and then I woke up here in this crib of yours. Smithers takes corners rather recklessly. Drives well, though, and understands me. Hope I'm not putting you to any inconvenience?'

'My dear fellow!'

'Curious, too, that I should meet you like this. What have you been doing with yourself all this time, besides getting married?'

'Not much, I fear.'

'Few of us seem to do much. I've made a beastly mess of it all round.'

'Sorry to hear that.'

Not that he was really sorry. As a matter of fact he was totally indifferent. More than once rumours of Brenton's mad doings had reached him. Had the news come of his hanging he would not have been surprised. The only surprising thing was that his doings had not reached a more definite stage than rumour. Born to a title which, if not distinguished by any action that the world could justly applaud, was yet not wholly unknown, and wealth which permitted him to gratify every whim, Digby Brenton had made no attempt to seize his unmerited oppor-

tunities. From boyhood upward the way had been made easy for him ; fortune smiled so persistently that he had come to regard her smiles as his especial prerogative. That all things in this world were not ordered just as he would have them was one of those petty annoyances with which the great are not infrequently confronted. Yet notwithstanding these drawbacks he managed to go through the world with a high chin.

From a reclining posture he now sat up in one corner of the sofa and let his eyes wander slowly round the room. Vermont watched him closely. He remembered that dictatorial, overbearing manner, the harsh voice which was not slow to pour contempt on those with whom he disagreed. Brenton had never been lovable even as a boy, and the man betrayed no increase of the gentler qualities. The manner, even in repose, was as uncompromising as ever, the pronounced jaw and penetrating glance being ever on the aggressive.

‘ That whisky is good,’ he said ; ‘ it has put new life into me.’

‘ Have another ? ’

‘ Thanks.’

A second libation had a still more surprising effect. The colour, a swarthy red, came back to his face ; his eyes shone with a keener intelligence,

and he began to curl the ends of his thick, dark moustache. As he did so he incidentally showed the mouth beneath, and Vermont saw that it was the heavy mouth of a sensualist, the teeth being strong and large. A hundred vague reminiscences crowded in upon him: he saw that the boy had grown into the man he might have expected.

‘By George!’ he was saying, ‘this is a rum go meeting you in this fashion. I think I have passed this cottage quite a dozen times within the last month. Have you been here long?’

‘A couple of weeks.’

‘And you are staying?’

‘Just the month. My wife fancied it for a change.’

‘She’s young, I suppose?’

‘Yes.’

‘Wouldn’t come here if she wasn’t. Romantic, I suppose?’ and a smile which was like a sneer passed over his face. ‘They’re all romantic when they’re young—that, and other things. Chiefly the other things. Let me congratulate you. No idea you were married: but then I’ve been out of England for a long time, wandering through Europe and Asia. You know I was always a restless sort of devil. A bit wild, eh?’ Vermont nodded. ‘“Mad Brenton” it was in the old days.’ He

smiled. 'Oh, I know. Madder Brenton it ought to be now. But what can one expect whose grandfather died a raving lunatic? You didn't know that, Vermont? Didn't you fag for me at Eton?'

'Yes.'

'Was I very hot?'

'I've forgotten.'

He smiled, but this time as if memory awakened that smile.

'And so you're married?'

'Is there anything surprising in that?'

'None at all, my dear fellow. Men will do these things. But where is Madam? Am I to be permitted the honour of a presentation?'

'She may return at any moment.' Indeed he was then much concerned as to Andromeda. If she were to wake, what would she think of his prolonged absence? 'But you, are you also married?'

He did not know why he asked the question, for he was not in the least interested. Perhaps it was by way of making conversation, or turning the talk from Andromeda. The result, however, was infinitely more surprising than he had anticipated. Brenton suddenly jerked himself to an upright position and positively glowered upon his questioner.

'You did not know?'

‘My dear fellow, I have seen nothing of you for years.’

He did not think it necessary to recall certain rumours. An unreasoning fit of obstinacy would not let him show Brenton that he was of sufficient importance to be talked about. For of a sudden an inexplicable spirit of antagonism had risen against this man. He resented his abrupt, domineering manner, that aggressive thrust of the heavy jaw, the amused superior smile which the eye reflected in a none too conciliatory light. It had been thus in their young days. Brenton had ridden roughshod over his fellows then, and evidently he had continued in the ways of his youth. Even now there was a lingering condescension of manner which seemed innate to the man.

‘Oh yes, I’m married,’ he said, controlling himself with an effort; ‘I thought perhaps you knew.’

‘No.’

Vermont showed how little interested he was in the matter by turning to the open window and gazing out across the roadway. In the bend behind the bushes he could hear voices of men and the stamping of a horse, and doubted not that it was there the wrecked car lay. Curious the part that motor cars seemed suddenly to play in his life.

‘ You have found the experiment successful ? ’

The voice came to him like a low, lingering sneer and took him completely by surprise. Fortunately his face was turned away or the other might have marked the sudden start, the quick confusion.

‘ Quite.’

‘ You ’re lucky. I suppose you married for love ? ’

‘ I cannot imagine a man marrying for any other reason.’

‘ Nor I : that ’s the trouble. Men are such infernal fools. A woman can always play tricks with a man in love. They ’re a crafty tribe, Vermont : clever as Satan, deep as hell.’

‘ So I have heard.’

‘ But you haven’t found ’em out yet ? ’

‘ Some of us have better luck than others.’

‘ Do we ? I ’ve never seen it yet.’

‘ Then you have not been lucky ? That ’s strange. All things used to go your way once.’

‘ Oh, I ’ve been lucky enough ; and as for things going my way—I made ’em, that ’s the reason. You know, one can force destiny. The only thing is to know when to stop.’

‘ Which no man ever did.’

‘ One may stop too soon as well as too late.’

‘ Yet if you have been able to force destiny you surely have little cause of complaint ? ’

He looked Vermont up and down with a curiously penetrating glance.

‘ My dear fellow, there is a certain smugness about you which betrays the Philistine ease of conscience. I can foresee a large family and a fat wife, and church at least once on Sundays. Now for me there is none of these joys, and curiously enough I should like to try them. As long as I could remember I have been more or less in hell, and at times I have found the company inexpressibly dull. Also, curiously enough, it is chiefly inhabited by women. As you are doubtless aware, all the great lovers are in hell : it’s the only place for them. Great lovers ! Pah ! ’

Startling was the glance that Vermont suddenly flung on him. In spite of himself a cold tremor swept him from head to foot.

The other continued :

‘ When are we going to assert our supremacy and put woman back in her proper place ? Instead of commanding her, as our wild forefathers did, we buy her smiles with the last little shred of honour and self-respect. We have pickled a rod for our own backs, nourished a scorpion whose only gratitude is to sting. When I think of the fools they make of us, husbands and lovers ! A man cannot even swear that the children he claims are his own. Do

what you will for them, make any sacrifice you like, your reward will be the same, disdain, ingratitude, and contempt.'

He rose from the sofa and began furiously to pace the room. His face grew hot and angry, his eyes almost ferocious in their burning penetration. Vermont looked at him in amazement. Always eccentric, he had no doubt whatever that Brenton's eccentricity verged near to madness. Surely no one could conduct himself so unreasonably. That he had suffered through women was probably his own fault. Vermont had no interest in him or his sufferings. One thing was certain: the world was not going to stand still even for a greater than Sir Digby Brenton. Nature herself must ultimately resent the sway of the despot even if she calls in death as a last resource.

'Isn't the condemnation somewhat sweeping?'

'I beg your pardon. Of course your case is exceptional.' He strode to the window and looked out. 'Why the devil doesn't that fool come with the cab! Are we far from civilisation?'

'Perhaps nearer than you think.'

But the retort was lost on him. He was so obviously full of himself and his own thoughts that he had no room for the consideration of others. It was always thus with him. If the world did not

stand still for his especial benefit it was not because it ought not, but because of some perverse influence which always seemed to thwart him.

Vermont prayed fervently for the arrival of that cab. He dreaded to think that Andromeda might return at any moment and be forced to meet this unpleasant person. Inwardly he fumed at the misfortune which laid this accident at his door. He had neither inclination nor interest enough to rebut the man's wild tirades : they were in keeping with what he knew of him, what he had heard. And in a way his own hands were tied. What even if he should have met her ? Truly no one could know less of her than he did. And inside of it all, as it were, was a thought which almost amounted to a fear.

Slowly the time dragged onward, his unwelcome guest now falling into a fit of moody abstraction, and now dilating in a vein which sorely plagued his listener. His theme was ever the inconstancy and ingratitude of women, against whom he seemed to bear a bitter resentment, a resentment so little in accord with Vermont's own feelings that he grew intolerably weary of the infliction. Yet the man, lost in the consciousness of his own wrongs, real or imaginary, paid no heed to the utter boredom, fast merging upon irritability, of his host. That the

world could possibly have any other grievance than that which animated him to such excessive outbursts of vituperation never seemed to cross his mind. My trouble is the world's: what else matters !

But at length, when hope was almost gone, the fly did make its appearance, and to his host's immeasurable relief the unwelcome visitor began his hurried adieux. He muttered something about being glad to see him, hoped they would meet again soon, and the like, and turned with extended hand when Andromeda's voice was heard calling :

‘ Perseus, Perseus ! ’

Brenton shot bolt upright as though he had received a sudden shock, the extended hand fell with a thud to his side, and a wild, questioning look sprang to his eyes.

‘ Who is that ? ’ he asked, his voice vibrating strangely.

‘ My wife.’

‘ I should like to make her acquaintance.’

Vermont did not attempt to hide his annoyance. He would have spared Andromeda this, as he sought to spare her all unpleasantness, but he was no longer able to control the situation. Still crying, ‘ Perseus, Perseus ! ’ she entered the room.

VII

At first, not noticing the presence of a third person, for at the rapid swish of her skirts Brenton had drawn back, she began somewhat imperiously to question him on his absence. He turned with a shrug towards his visitor, and her eyes, following his, suddenly dilated with horror. She staggered back as though about to faint, an action which wrung from him a cry of alarm and a quick movement. But Brenton was there before him. Springing forward he caught her roughly by the wrist and drew her savagely towards him.

‘ So, I ’ve found you at last ! ’

The touch and the words awoke her. With an effort she straightened herself and looked him in the eyes ; the words failed to come, though the lips trembled with the attempt. Vermont regarded her with amazement, though almost instantly the truth flashed upon him.

‘ It ’s been a long chase, Irene,’ Brenton was saying in a voice of suppressed passion, ‘ but you know me better than to think I would abandon it.’

‘ I wish God had struck you dead,’ she cried vehemently.

‘ No doubt : but you see He hasn’t. Part of that inscrutability, I imagine, which has puzzled the sages of all time. You look extremely well, though : things have been going smoothly here with our friend Vermont ? ’ He turned with a bitter smile as he addressed his host. ‘ This, I presume, is the wife of which you spoke ? Curious that, because she is also my wife.’

The man was now apparently more cool and composed than he had been during the whole of the interview, and Carey Vermont turned to him with a look in which alarm and amazement were expressed in unmistakable terms.

‘ Your wife ? ’ he repeated incredulously.

‘ I sustain that honour with much difficulty.’

‘ Andromeda ! ’ He turned appealingly to her.

‘ God help me,’ she answered bitterly.

‘ He seems to have helped you in strict accordance with your many merits,’ sneered Brenton. ‘ But why “ Andromeda ” ? I don’t seem to know the name—at least in this connection. Ah, yes, she called you Perseus. Quite charming. She was always quaintly imaginative.’

As one who had no doubt of his rights he assumed a tone of superiority. Andromeda regarded him

as a bird might the fascination of a serpent. There was fear and terror in her gaze : also an unspeakable loathing. Vermont glanced uneasily from one to the other, his mind throbbing with swift conjecture. Of the many things he had imagined in connection with her, this one thing had never come within the range of probability. Digby Brenton's wife—Mad Brenton ! Did this explain all that had gone before ?

Brenton, speaking, recalled his wandering faculties.

‘ You seem surprised,’ he was saying in a low, harsh tone : ‘ you did not know that this lady was my wife ? ’

‘ No.’

‘ But now that you are made aware of that surprising fact ? ’

‘ I still think that by your brutality you have forfeited all claim to this lady's consideration. For the rest, the remedy is in your own hands.’

‘ Being aware of that fact I shall not need you to dictate my course of action. That is one of the things I do in my own way, Mr. Vermont, and presently I shall have something to say to you on that head. There is a cab at the door, Irene : are you ready ? ’

‘ I will go no more with you,’ she said deter-

minedly. 'There is a limit even to the bearing of brutality, and I have reached it. My fate is here with the man I love.'

With a gesture of defiance and contempt she held out her hand, which Perseus took and pressed fervently.

'Ah, yes,' he sneered, 'you were always a generous lover, always ready to sacrifice yourself on the altar of affection—for any one who had no legal claim to it. But I cannot permit that unparalleled generosity of yours to betray you into further unnecessary sacrifices. The loss of affection does not necessarily imply the absence of obligation. I must endeavour to save you even in spite of yourself.'

'Hypocrite and liar,' she said fiercely, all the terror of him seeming to have flown in the face of her great anger, 'when did you ever consider or spare any one who might minister to your brutal instincts! I hate you, loathe you, despise you, and would sooner die than live for a moment under the same roof with you. This is my secret, Perseus, this is the horror I have kept from you. This man has made my life a hell. He is not a man but a monster, a filthy, unclean creature, for whom there is no word but hatred, no thought but detestation.'

She stopped, panting. A cold smile like the cracking of ice broke over Brenton's face. But his

heavy nether lip twitched ominously, and the gleam in his eye was coldly cruel.

‘Spare these impassioned heroics,’ he replied in a low, hard, grating voice. ‘I repeat, the cab is at the door. You seem to forget that you are my wife.’

‘No, no, Perseus, don’t let him touch me,’ she screamed, clinging excitedly to Vermont’s arm. ‘The man is a monster, and I will not go with him.’

Carey Vermont drew her aside, interposing himself between her and her husband. Brenton’s face flushed darkly, his hands opening and shutting with strong, convulsive action. With an effort, however, he restrained himself, though it was easy to see his fury bubbling beneath the surface.

‘Unhappily,’ he began with cold, forced indifference, ‘I was mad enough to marry this woman, and I am still quixotic enough to believe that marriage has its obligations. But believe me it is not love of her which makes me so insistent, but rather thought of my own good name.’

‘Your good name!’ she cried.

‘For which you appear to have so little consideration.’

‘The remedy is in your hands,’ said Vermont once again.

‘I am well aware of that fact, and shall act upon it in my own time, and in my own way. But the

situation is an extremely delicate one, the circumstances quite unique. In branding this woman as infamous how shall I avoid my own discredit? You see, in dealing with her we are not dealing with the average normal woman, who, whatever her instincts may be, has decency enough to hide them; but rather with one of those abnormal creatures who glory in unrestraint. There are men of her type, and they end either in prison or a madhouse.'

'Where you would be now but for your money,' she said.

'It is inevitable that some of us should be cursed by destiny,' he continued, totally ignoring her remark. 'When I married this woman two years ago, in Rome, I had just returned from an extended wandering in Asia, and I frankly confess she fascinated me. She was a public singer in Rome, of some local reputation, I believe. Of the singularity of that reputation I knew nothing then, though I have learnt much since. It was, unfortunately, too late to retrieve the error, but not too late to attempt the guardianship of my own honour. Perhaps you are able fully to appreciate the result of that guardianship?'

The voice was level, cold, and inexpressibly contemptuous. Had he been speaking of some unclean, crawling creature he could not have voiced

his disdain with a more complete, impersonal indifference. As he listened Vermont grew hot and cold by turns. Refutation bubbled to his lips only to die away in impotent breathings.

‘ You do not believe him ! ’ she gasped.

‘ Not a word,’ he said. She slipped her hand in his. Her fingers, which had been like ice, were now burning as with fever.

‘ Yet who should know better than you that I am speaking the truth ? In any case it cannot alter the matter. Not being responsible for her actions, this woman is not fit to be at large. Though, so far, you appear not to see the matter in this light, I can assure you that I am about to relieve you of an intolerable burden. The care is mine, worse luck ; another of the many crosses which have been heaped upon me by inconsiderate fate.’

‘ Until that care has merged into brutality ? ’

‘ So that is the story ? I don’t know why I listen to you, unless it is the result of that sympathy for a mutual victim. A fellow feeling, my dear sir. We must stop these mad pranks. She must make no more fools of men.’

Though his voice was still steady enough, his manner a strained composure, his eyes began to dart wild glances round the room. The veins in them seemed to grow more prominent, the glitter

more cruelly fierce, while his lower lip, which had grown pale, quivered with an agitation he was powerless to conceal.

‘I can only suggest again that you have your remedy,’ said Vermont in a cold voice.

‘But I have already told you my objection to that method. I would suggest—respectfully suggest—that my wife return to her duties.’

‘That I will never do, I swear it,’ cried Andromeda vehemently. ‘I would rather die first.’

‘No, my dear Irene, your sort don’t die for so little provocation. They prefer to live—and enjoy themselves. Perhaps, Mr. Vermont, you are not aware that all our difficulties have arisen through a mistaken sense of what enjoyment really means? My wife and I hold different opinions on this subject. Hence a multiplicity of misunderstandings. But for the life of me I cannot conceive why I take the trouble to enter into these explanations. It seems to me a matter with which you have no concern whatever. I must confess my patience surprises me: I did not think I had such command of any one virtue. Singular perversity of nature. But the time is flying. Are you ready, Irene?’

‘I will not go with you,’ she said. ‘Perseus, I am afraid. Do not let him touch me.’

A slow smile broke over Brenton’s dark face.

‘One would think that I have been unnecessarily brutal, when I have only sought to impose restraint. Perseus!’ He smiled queerly as he rolled the word round his tongue. ‘I think I understand the application. A harsh measure, I admit, but one not unfitting the offence.’

‘The offence, that I would not submit to his degrading me lower than the beasts,’ she cried; ‘that I would not become the loathsome creature he would make of me, submit to his brutalised instincts, pander to his unspeakable depravity.’

‘What had you to lose!’ He spoke harshly, the blood mounting to his forehead. ‘Come, enough of this. I grow weary. Too long have I condescended to argue the matter. I haven’t hunted for you for weeks to let you go now that I’ve found you. That I find you here, the mistress of this man, is no surprise. But you are mine, by every law you are mine, and I will not have my name made a byword and a jest. These are my rights and, by God, I mean to insist on them!’

He sprang forward as if to seize her, but with a sharp cry of terror she slipped like a flash from the room, swiftly slamming the door behind her. Vermont flew to the door and placed his back against it. Brenton advanced upon him with a

flushed and furious face, hands clenched and uplifted as if to strike. But meeting a steady and resolute gaze he stopped short, and a wicked, contemptuous smile broke slowly across his face.

‘ You fool, she ’s not worth it ! ’

VIII

VERMONT nodded, but he never shifted his glance from the scowling, sneering face before him. Believing an attack to be imminent he prepared to meet it. Indeed the hope was surging wildly in him that Brenton would precipitate a quarrel. His mood was such that he would willingly have wiped off some of the debt that Andromeda owed.

‘I tell you she’s not worth it,’ repeated Brenton savagely, ‘and if it were not for the sake of my own good name I should let her go to the devil with all the pleasure in life. The woman has been a curse to me, a curse to all with whom she has come in contact. Such women are born to be the plague and horror of a man’s life. They are like a deadly blight or miasma that destroys all green and good things: there is nothing for them but annihilation, a swift blotting out, utter and infinite extinction. Good God, man, would you nourish a viper, or offer your soul to the devil as a plaything! I tell you, you cannot even guess your peril. Let danger upon

danger accumulate, but it is nothing to the catastrophe that threatens you here.'

Curiously nervous was his attitude as he delivered this warning : more curious still the mad, glaring look in his eyes. Why he did not spring or strike Vermont could not conceive. Every moment it seemed as though he would hurl himself forward and so put supremacy to the touch. Yet the mad humour of the situation was not less than his anger, and in a way he seemed to appreciate it. Also there may have been pity for this determined defender of the worthless.

'I can believe you perfectly innocent of all knowledge.' It was ominous how the long fingers expanded and contracted like the claws of a tiger. 'When a woman makes up her mind to deceive, a man is a mere infant in her hands. We're no match for their cunning, Vermont : we are as a piece of flotsam caught in the whirl of the maelstrom. Once, among the mountains of India, a bearer of mine slipped and fell over a precipice. Hearing his shriek, I looked down and saw him whirling through space : saw him clutch with fingers and toes the thin air as he twisted through it. Three thousand feet below we might have found his body if we had taken the trouble to look. Well, a man in the hands of a woman is like that bearer, and with as little hope.'

‘ Or a woman in the hands of a bad man ? ’

A superior smile of pity and contempt gave to his glance an unpleasant condescension ; but Vermont was shrewd to see how the mind, perverted by passion, was yet given to speculation, nor was he slow to avail himself of the suggestion.

‘ Of course you have heard things ? The awakening of pity is one of the arts least neglected by woman. When everything else fails she invariably resorts to tears. I know her so well : too well for my peace of mind. Between a woman and her tears lie all the depths of infamous disaster. One can almost hear them splash into hell ! ’

He ceased for a moment and seemed to listen, face eager, eyes aflame with expectancy. Vermont shuddered in spite of himself. The tension was horrible, intolerable. If at any moment he had entertained doubts of Brenton’s sanity he could now doubt no longer. Yet there was a cool, calm, reasoning faculty about the man which could not be denied. If this were really madness then did it seem doubly dangerous.

‘ Listen to me, Brenton,’ he said, conceiving it the wiser course to approach the man without betraying a suspicion of his inner thoughts. ‘ You quite believe, in the first place, that I was totally unaware of her relationship to you ? ’

‘ I must.’

‘ That she may be all you say I am rather inclined to doubt ; but even if she were, that is no excuse for your gross treatment of her. I presume you have already guessed how I found her ? ’

‘ I think so.’

‘ Stark naked—tied to a tree ! Your wife, Brenton—think ! This is not the day of the heathen, but that of the civilised Christian. The savage who could be guilty of such an act makes himself amenable to the law of the land. Why, man, it becomes a matter for the police.’

He smiled. ‘ Why doesn’t she denounce me ! ’

‘ How could any modest woman——’

But Brenton cut him short with a harsh laugh.

‘ Modest woman ! So you are still fool enough to use that worn-out cliché. Shall I tell you something about this “ modest woman,” this modest—— She was all that before I married her. I admit her feminine attractions : they are many, they fascinated me. I did not care what she had been : I did not stay to think. I only knew that I wanted her, wanted her madly ; and she played her game to perfection. Oh, the cunning of her, the supreme insolence ! But how to turn black white ? Her end achieved, there was less cause for subterfuge. Train a tiger to lie down with a lamb : by taking

thought transfer the leopard's spots. This was my task. . . . When a woman is like that no power on earth can save her. It is like drink or drugs, hopeless : the end inevitable. I did all in my power. I have beaten her.'

' Beaten her ! You dog ! '

Andromeda beaten ! The blood surged to his eyes : for a moment he saw things through a crimson mist.

' Why not ! Is not the husband a law unto the wife ? Has not the law the power and the right to punish the evildoer ? This last punishment seemed peculiarly fitted to her crimes. One must exorcise the devil at all costs.'

' And you would have left her there to perish ? '

' Oh no. I should have returned at dusk : as a matter of fact I did. The result you know. Ever since I have been dashing about in search of her. For love, of course.' He laughed weirdly, though his eye was steady, cold, and unresponsive. ' Singular how fortune favours the indefatigable. What god is it, I wonder, that watches over the destinies of desperate husbands ? But for this opportune accident I might now be flying somewhere through Sussex. Don't you see the hand of Providence ? It makes me think that there may be something sacramental in marriage after all. You have no idea how inconceivably attached I am to

the bond. Marriage imposes a serious and inalienable obligation on a man. Not alone is his own integrity at stake, but into his charge has been given something even more sacred, the integrity of one who would be lost utterly without his wisdom and guidance. By God, Vermont, it's a terrible thing to love a woman to distraction, and to desire her in spite of hell !'

While he was speaking Carey Vermont watched him with increasing wonder. At times he had no doubt of the man's madness : again there came a doubt, and with it infinite concern. How much of this weird tale he was to believe he could not say, while the thought of being disloyal to Andromeda, even for a moment, filled him with an inconceivable contempt of himself. Yet while he despised and hated this intolerable monster there were certain rappings at his brain which could not be wholly denied. That he would open to their insistence was entirely another matter. But in the meantime the man was here, and the situation was of extreme delicacy.

That Andromeda would return with her husband he did not for a moment believe, nor did he hide from himself the fact that of all possible solutions this was the one he least desired. Come what might he could not part with her now. Even were

her offences infinitely more serious than Brenton had suggested, she was still the woman who loved him, whom he loved. He had seen nothing monstrous in her, nor did he believe it to exist. Moreover, what of her explanation? Was he to wave it aside to credit the tale of this madman?

But how to circumvent the enemy? Brenton had maintained an attitude of scrupulous contempt: he had spoken, too, as a man of no wandering fancy. That the brute was strong in him that heavy jaw proclaimed. Vermont measured him coolly, carefully, as a thinking man might regard an onerous task before him. How far could he go? That she must not return to her husband was evident: that she would not be believed. Was reason to be entirely banished?

Almost like one in a dream he had listened to Brenton's talk, yet ever on the alert to discover the flaw, the weakness of which he might take advantage. Yet he never discovered it. If this man was mad there was little to show it. Rather did he give the impression of one who was so sure of himself, so sure of ultimate victory, that he was ready to treat all opposition with the utmost tolerance. There was through it all a concentrated air of superiority which impressed even while it annoyed, an unshaken belief in the power and the

right of his cause with which Carey Vermont believed he would have no little difficulty in dealing.

‘Can you understand,’ he began tentatively, ‘that I have learnt to love this woman?’

‘Quite well. She is the kind of woman a man would love, not knowing her.’

‘What if she also should love me?’

‘That would be doubly unfortunate. She will probably die in the gutter.’ His lips curled sarcastically. Evidently the thought was not altogether unpalatable.

‘Not while I live. Don’t you understand, Brenton? We are fighting for this woman’s soul—you and I.’

‘Her soul! I doubt if she has one. Or if she has, it is already lost. Or if not lost, there is no one, except me, who can save it. Are you also beginning to see light ahead?’

Not much, he inwardly confessed: yet it was something that this man consented to argument.

‘Shall we let her choose between us?’

Again Brenton’s lips curled scornfully, though this time the scorn suggested an underthought of amusement.

‘No: she would choose the wrong instinctively. My obvious and imperative duty is to bring her back to reason.’

‘By what means? In these days the task of forcing a woman is not easy. You have had some experience of that.’

‘And learnt by experience. Really, Vermont, I seem to be treating you with quite unnecessary consideration. Singular, too, how a man obstinately refuses to accept grace. But time flies.’ Indeed the sun was already throwing across the grass a long, black shadow of the house. ‘You will admit that I have listened to you with some degree of patience. Now, if you have no objection, having given the lady some time to think, we will see if she is more amenable to reason.’

Vermont was still for barring his progress, but a sudden wild hope sprang to life within him. Andromeda was a woman of resource, imagination, courage. Had she made good the opportunity? He stood aside with a low bow and an anxious beating of the heart. Brenton strode towards the door with a triumphant smile, opened it, and called loudly, ‘Irene!’

In answer to his call Mrs. Selton came clattering from the kitchen, her manner greatly agitated.

‘Where is your mistress?’ asked Brenton sharply, suspiciously. She turned an appealing glance to Vermont. He nodded.

‘Gone, sir,’ she gasped.

‘Gone!’ Brenton almost screamed the word.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Where—when—which way?’

She pointed through the back door over against the woods. Brenton uttered a furious exclamation and dashed out. Vermont followed him to the door and watched him as he flew along the little path.

‘How long has she been gone?’ he asked of the trembling woman by his side.

‘Quite a little time, sir. She seemed like one gone suddenly mad as she came from the room. But she stopped at the doorway and looked at me with wild eyes. “Something has happened,” she said, “and I am going away. But tell him I will come back again.” That was all, sir. Then she bolted like a deer towards the woods. Pore lady, she was scared to death. What is it, sir?’

But without answering he flung off after the flying Brenton. His brain was awlirl, every nerve of him was throbbing excitedly. A thousand vague apprehensions besieged him: his ears throbbed with a multitude of strange sounds. Yet through it all her message beat with singular insistence.

‘I will come back again—tell him I will come back again.’

IX

THROUGH the woods he flew, over the heathlands, calling 'Andromeda! Andromeda!' Trembling he listened for the reply, but no sound reached him. Each nook, each spot which she had consecrated by her presence, and which had now become holy ground to him, he visited in turn, but caught neither sight nor sound of her. Nor of that other, the pursuer, the man who had hunted her down at last. How he hated him! Both had disappeared, swallowed up, as it were, by the fast descending night.

He maintained his search until a late hour, but without success. Then slowly he dragged a weary body and a more weary mind back to the cottage. Could she by any chance have returned? It was a faint hope, almost still-born. He could not think that she would return, though there was the desperate hope that she might crawl back to him.

'Andromeda!' he moaned, 'Andromeda!'

A light shone through the open door of the kitchen, and Mrs. Selton gazed up at him with a strained

look of interrogation. He shook his head despondently.

‘ She has not returned ? ’

‘ No, sir.’

She followed him into the sitting-room, lamp in hand.

‘ I have prepared your supper, sir.’ Absently he thanked her. ‘ I suppose you will not want me any more to-night ? ’

‘ No.’

When she was gone he took the lamp in his hand and entered their bedroom. All was just as he had last seen it. There was her light coat hanging behind the door ; her little satin slippers were at the foot of the bed. Nothing had been touched. He remembered that she had worn her hat all through that painful interview : he remembered many little trivial things, incongruous little things in the face of such a calamity. He leant over the bed and kissed her pillow.

‘ Andromeda ! ’ he whispered, ‘ Andromeda ! ’

Back again in the sitting-room he placed the light in the window. Somewhere out there she might be creeping through brake or hedgerow. Almost he fancied he could see her white face shining at him through the night. Higher he lifted the window and drew back the curtains.

Attracted by the light, numerous insects fluttered into the room. Curiously he watched them as they whirled round and round the lamp. Sometimes they blundered blindly to their death. He saw them die without pity or remorse. Things had a way of dying. Flowers and moths—and women.

Mechanically he lit a pipe and sat down to wait and watch. Always in moments of great mental agitation he smoked, smoked incessantly, almost unknowingly. It was to him what drink is to another. But his eyes rarely left the window, his ears were ever on the alert. A dozen times he rose swiftly to his feet. What was that! Some sound, heard only by him, seemed to startle the night. Why did she not come?—would she never come? Did she not know that he was waiting for her?—that he would be waiting? Together they could steal away and be lost in the wilderness of men. What cause of fear had she with him beside her?

What was that! Softly he sprang to his feet and crossed over to the window. Even a cat might not have heard the sound. Yet low as it was it fell distinctly on his ear. He looked out into the night.

‘Andromeda!’ he whispered, ‘Andromeda!’

Out of the darkness came a low, mocking laugh,

and Brenton, his face ghastly, pallid, emerged into the light.

‘ So you keep late vigil ? ’ he sneered.

But Vermont did not mark the tone : he only saw the man who had gone in pursuit.

‘ Have you seen her ? ’ he asked eagerly.

The other laughed that low, cold, tantalising laugh.

‘ No—not yet. But see how the moths are attracted by that light.’ Then he laughed again.

‘ She will return.’

His teeth gleamed ominously behind his pale lips : the eyes were shining with an unnatural brilliancy, shining like pin points of fire through the night. He was bareheaded, and his dark hair hung low on his forehead in jagged wisps. His collar had gone, torn away from its fastening, and showed his bare, muscular throat. Dishevelled, torn by shrub and briar, face emaciated, eyes gleaming, he looked like a man who had walked out of a nightmare. Vermont shuddered as he looked at him and knew that he was mad.

‘ I shall wait,’ he said ; ‘ we will both wait.’

He turned away chuckling. Vermont called to him in desperation, but received no reply. Like a phantom the man had come : like a shadow he faded away.

The long night dragged through and the day

began to break, but Andromeda never came near. Then the watcher, still leaving the lamp burning, the window and doors wide open, crawled into the other room, and, dressed as he was, flung himself on the bed. Mrs. Selton, coming at her usual hour, found him in a deep, uneasy sleep, and wakened him ; but he only turned from her and buried his face in the pillow.

How that day passed by he really never knew. Now he was scouring the neighbourhood with feverish steps, inquiring of all with whom he came in contact, and now waiting, watching by the window, or pacing with hasty strides the strip of grass before the cottage.

But she never came.

Neither had he caught sight or sign of Brenton, though he half believed that the man loitered somewhere in the immediate vicinity. Imagination played strange tricks with him. Sometimes he would start and turn quickly round, being sure that he heard her footstep : again he would rush wildly into the house, certain that she had called to him. At other times he fancied he could see Brenton's evil face staring at him through the hedge opposite. Once he swung swiftly across the roadway to explore, and found—nothing. Brenton also had vanished from the face of things.

But she never came.

On the following morning his mind was made up. He would go to London, whither she had probably flown. He remembered now that her purse contained two or three gold pieces: likewise that she wore the ring and the bangle he had given her in Guildford. Though the former was merely a wedding ring (he remembered how she professed disdain of such a subterfuge), the latter was of some value. She would not be without food and shelter. Also she knew his town address. Unless her protestations were wholly false, she would communicate with him.

‘I am going to London,’ he explained to Mrs. Selton, ‘and may return to-night, but of this I cannot be certain. If I do not, you must stay here and wait in case she comes. If she does, tell her I have gone to look for her, give her this money, and tell her to follow.’

He slipped a bank-note into the hands of the frightened woman and left her. Truly she had never seen so great a change in a man. His usually impassive face was twitching with excitement: his eyes had grown piercing and wild. The good lady was quite convinced that she had been sheltering a brood of escaped lunatics.

Arriving in London he sprang into a taxi and

was whirled with all haste to his rooms in Westminster. Eagerly he searched his accumulated correspondence, but without finding a word from her. Again he went over it swiftly, feverishly, but he knew that he was searching for that which did not exist. Stupefied, he looked at the pile of letters, scarcely yet believing that which he knew to be true. Then he rang for the porter. Was he sure that no lady had been making inquiries? The man was certain. He had not yet been away for his holiday: he was not going until the end of the month. If he could do anything. Smales had been round the day before: he often called in case he should be wanted.

‘Send him to me when he comes,’ he said.

He went out and walked the streets for hours in the hope of seeing her. When he returned, foot-sore and sick at heart, the imperturbable Smales was waiting for him. Smales’s round eyes opened wide with apprehension as he noted the change in his master’s appearance.

‘Are you ill, sir? What has happened?’

He told him, more or less coherently. Smales listened respectfully, but evinced no great surprise. He had expected something, if not this.

‘I have come to find her,’ explained the master, ‘and you must help me. London is a big place,

John, but the odds are in favour of the West End. We must search.' He gave him money. 'Go everywhere, follow every clue. I shall not rest until I have found her.'

Smales would have been little less than human had he not taken some credit for his own prescience, but never by a flicker of the eyelid did he betray it. This despair of another was not the moment for his triumph. While he believed that, in spite of himself, Carey Vermont was being served well by fate, he had no other wish than to serve, to ease the anguish which was so painfully apparent.

'We 'll find her, sir,' he said.

BOOK III
A T R O P O S

I

LONDON was supposed to be empty. It is a consoling fiction which still obtains among a certain section of the vast community, especially that section which annually migrates to the country-house or the continental watering-place, where the evil effects of general intemperance are supposed to receive a salutary check. Carey Vermont found that there were still a few millions left in the great metropolis who seemed totally oblivious of the fact that they did not count, or that a certain part of the more fashionable quarter was more or less deserted. Freed of that self-sufficient section, London was quite an agreeable desert, which he haunted with most amazing persistency.

To be sure, a regular habitu   of the Park would have found its desolation heartbreaking. The numerous empty chairs seemed to grin in desperation at their loneliness : the ticket collectors lounged in the shade of the trees and dozed. Here and there an occasional carriage broke the long monotony

of deserted road ; frequently that carriage was so obviously hired for the occasion as to need no second glance. Now and again the strident Transatlantic accent reached him : frequently he passed a little knot of foreigners, the women overdressed, the men unspeakable. Though he took no interest in them, he could not help comparing the men with the women. The Frenchwoman, if she did not always look a lady, wore clothes of some attractiveness ; but the men !

Slowly the conviction was forced on him that London deserted was a restful, pleasant sort of place, though from another point of view the desolation was wicked. Yet at that moment he would have found little to charm him in a crowd.

As he swung along by Stanhope Gate he glanced eagerly to the right and left. Twice already he had walked from the Row to the Marble Arch, and he was now beating the homeward journey. Sometimes he would dash across the grass to get a better view of a woman walking in the distance. Any figure that at all resembled Andromeda's he trembled to approach. Indeed he was so closely watching a woman on the other side of the road that he failed to notice a carriage drawn up against the rails, or a pale, eager face which was watching him intently.

‘ Mr. Vermont ! ’

He started at the sound of his own name : almost for the moment it seemed as though it could not be his. As he turned and looked into that eager face, a curious, nervous glance shot from his eyes.

‘ Pauline ! ’ he said as he approached the carriage. She held out her hand in cordial greeting.

‘ You are surprised to see me ? ’

‘ Rather. What are you doing in town in the dog days ? ’

‘ Duty.’ He looked at her for further explanation. ‘ You did not know, of course. You have not been near us for so long.’ There was the suggestion of a reproach in this. ‘ My aunt was too ill to leave town, and I am spending a week with her.’

‘ Always kind, Pauline.’

‘ Oh no ! What could one do ? ’

‘ There is only one other alternative.’

She protested prettily, and she was a pretty girl in rather a fragile manner. Her complexion, though pale—perhaps a little too pale—was amazingly clear, and free of all suggestion of unhealthiness. She had an exceedingly sweet red mouth, a straight nose, and fine dark eyes. Once he had thought those eyes full of wonder—until he had looked into eyes more wonderful.

‘But what are you doing here?’ she asked suddenly. ‘I thought you were motoring in Scotland.’

‘Man proposes.’ But his smile was not so free of embarrassment as he might have wished. ‘We had a serious breakdown, so I seized the opportunity to return and do a little business.’

She received his explanation without the least sign of suspicion, though there was a wistful, wondering look in her eyes which made him feel inexplicably guilty, and led almost to further explanation, which might have taken the fatal form of apology. People always said it was not easy to lie with Pauline Clarendon’s great, serious eyes staring at one.

‘Are you very busy now?’ she asked.

‘Oh dear, no.’

He answered almost before he was aware of it. Yet he quickly realised that he could have given no other reply.

‘Then let me drive you round the Park: or shall I drive you home?’

‘It’s ages since I have driven round the Park,’ he said.

She made room for him on the seat beside her, and the champing horses were immediately set going.

This too was a help for him, and as they bowled along he flung glances to right and left, but never at her, although she chatted incessantly. He did not notice that her chatter ceased of a sudden, and that a strained, wistful look came into those great, dark eyes.

‘Who are you looking for?’ she asked. He started, but as he turned to her he was smiling, and the answer came pat enough.

‘I was wondering if we should see any of our unfortunate friends.’

‘Unfortunate?’

‘Having to remain here in the dog days.’

‘Do you think it so unfortunate?’ she asked in a low voice.

‘On the contrary.’ He was looking at her now, but she, having said so much, dared not return his glance. ‘Nor would they if they could drive with you, Pauline. I am blessed beyond my deserts.’

‘Some people always are.’

He was rather glad she took it like that. It made things easier. Memory was hard at work. Scenes, incidents in which she had played no inconspicuous part, rapidly unrolled themselves. It was all so short a time ago, and yet how far away it seemed. What would she say if she knew? What she would think, he guessed. This pale

moon-girl was eclipsed in the gorgeous, sun-like rays of Andromeda. Andromeda! He almost wondered if he breathed the name aloud. Yet there was contrast too: the pale lily of chastity, the flaming, glorious rose. He looked more closely at her and wondered at the difference in women.

Why he had not asked her to be his wife he could not say. The word had bubbled to his tongue a score of times: there were occasions when the touch of her hand had made him tremble, when a look from her honest, brown eyes had shaken the soul of him. And now there was a whole passionate world between them. He looked at her without emotion, or with but a vague curiosity. She was still very sweet in her pale, lovely fashion. In her soft, white gown she looked so beautifully cool and fresh in the glare of that August sun. The great black hat with its white plumes added a perfect finish to the picture. Around them London steamed in an agony of heat. In places the grass showed brown and bare. Yet she moved through it all like a fragrant, white flower, and made him think of shady valleys and cool, sweet breezes.

‘I did not know Lady Sherringford was so ill,’ he said at last. He was not really interested in Lady Sherringford, but the white figure beside him had been strangely silent for some time.

‘ Poor aunt. I am afraid she has been rather bad, but we hope to get her down to Sherringford next week. Are you coming ? ’

‘ I hope so,’ he replied ; ‘ though this wretched business with the car is sure to upset my arrangements.’

‘ It will probably not be very gay,’ she said. The little catch in her voice may or may not have escaped him, and as he happened to be looking away at that moment he did not notice the slight indrawing of the lips.

‘ I suppose you are very much alone at present ? ’

Again he was not particularly interested, but it did strike him in a vague sort of way, owing, no doubt, to the obvious scarcity of vehicular traffic, that there really were very few people in town, that is, very few who counted.

‘ Occasionally an odd caller drops in. This morning we had the greatest surprise of all.’

‘ Oh ! ’

‘ Digby Brenton turned up, from Heaven knows where. He looked awfully ill, and behaved more eccentrically than ever.’

Digby Brenton ! Well for him that she was looking straight ahead or she must have noticed his agitation. He remembered now that Brenton was a cousin of hers, and that in years gone by

this same Lady Sherringford had unduly spoiled the boy. But Brenton in London ! Had he come to watch the flat in Westminster ?

‘ He always was rather eccentric,’ he said, and marvelled at the steadiness of his own voice.

‘ One might easily call it more than eccentricity,’ she replied. ‘ I suppose you heard of his marriage ? ’

‘ Ah, then he ’s married at last ! ’ he answered evasively. But he was still looking straight ahead of him, marvelling at the strange pranks we are sometimes forced to play.

‘ An awful mésalliance, aunt says : some singing woman whom he met abroad. Of course they were not happy. I believe she is not a very nice person.’

‘ Is he ? ’

‘ Oh, but that ’s different, isn’t it ? Besides, I know little of him beyond hearsay, and, frankly, that little has not been to his advantage. Personally I should say that he is quite mad.’

‘ You are charitable, my dear Pauline. Did he mention me at all ? ’

‘ I never heard.’

‘ Then you did not see him ? ’

‘ Only for a moment as he rushed from the room. I am not sure that he even knew who I was. He was muttering to himself in the most furious manner.

His face frightened me. Aunt says she is sure he is insane. His wife has left him.'

'Can you wonder at it?'

'Why, of course, I don't know the circumstance.'

'But you are ready to blame the woman, Pauline!'

'No, indeed I am not that kind of person. I am not one of those women who are ready to heap all the blame on their own sex. I thought you knew me better than that.'

'And so I think I do.'

'Of course you think me horrid.'

Though she turned sharply from him he caught a glimpse of the full, pouting mouth. After all, she was only a girl who was striving hard to play the part of a woman.

'On the contrary. But, of course, it doesn't matter much to you what I think?'

'Why should it? Tastes differ, you know.'

He smiled. She was only a petulant child after all.

'There can be no difference of opinion where you are concerned.'

'You still know how to flatter.'

The frown was breaking into a charming smile.

'I still know how to admire, how to appreciate. Come, we are still good friends, are we not?'

'Of course. But here we are at the Corner. Shall I drive you home?'

‘ It will not be putting you to any inconvenience ? ’

‘ How absurd you are.’

A young girl likes to call a man absurd, especially when she knows the epithet is not appropriate. The attitude is almost like an unmerited crown of dignity. As a rule, women are not averse from decking themselves in the unusual.

At another time he might have found some amusement in the situation, or a more serious interest ; but just then his thoughts were far away, and of a truth the girl’s chatter fell on rather unsympathetic ears.

They drew up before the building, dubbed ‘ mansions,’ where he lived, nor was she slow to note his alacrity in alighting. Women are never slow to note these things, infinitesimal instances which mark the gulf between the sexes.

‘ Thanks so much,’ he said as he held out his hand. ‘ It was awfully good of you to take pity on my loneliness.’

Something told her that it was all perfunctory, that he was but uttering the stereotyped common-places of his kind. Yet with a gulp she swallowed her pride and smiled.

‘ You are leaving town at once ? ’

‘ Almost.’

‘ Shall we see you at Sherringford ? ’

He hesitated. 'I—I hope so.'

The mouth drew in again, the eyes grew a trifle sullen.

'Then good-bye. I will tell my aunt I have seen you.'

'Remember me kindly to her.'

'Home!' she said quickly.

He drew back and watched the carriage as it rolled away. Irresolute he stood for a moment or so, a strange, wistful look in his eyes. Then straightening himself he turned and quickly crossed the pavement.

II

As he entered the hall the porter handed him a letter.

‘Came about an hour ago, sir,’ was the explanation.

Looking at the superscription he could scarcely suppress an exclamation of joy. Though he had only seen scraps of her handwriting he knew it in a moment. Yet he managed to preserve some show of dignity as he entered the lift and was carried to his flat. Yet almost before the door shut behind him the envelope was torn open.

‘I am here in Staines at the Swan,’ said the letter, which was written hurriedly on a sheet of plain paper. ‘If you can still believe in me—come. I am hoping that this will find you, but I dare not write to the Cottage. I am sick at heart, Perseus, and longing for the sight of you. What I have suffered! Your miserable Andromeda.’

The last word was a long, sprawling scrawl, written as one might write whose hand was trembling, whose eyes were dim with tears. Upon that

trembling scrawl he pressed his lips, hastily folded it up, put it in his breast-pocket, and then flew to the telephone.

Eagerly he hunted the book for the number of the Swan, fearful lest he should not find it there. But the place proved to be of sufficient importance to own a telephone, and he rang up the number. Interminable seemed the wait, as it always does when one is hanging on to the line ; but presently that low, humming sound reached his ear which denotes connection.

‘ Hullo ! ’

‘ Hullo ! Is that the Swan at Staines ? ’

‘ Yes. Who are you ? ’

This was a quandary. How had Andromeda named herself ? He hesitated, but not for long. There was only one course open to him, and he took it as a desperate venture.

‘ Will you tell Mrs. Vermont that her husband wants to speak to her.’

‘ Mrs. who ? ’

‘ Mrs. Vermont.’

‘ Oh ! Just hold on to the line for a minute.’

He hung on to it in an agony of desperation fearing lest he should be cut off. Other voices reached him mumbling along the line : indistinct sounds which seemed like the muttering of ghosts.

Was she there?—was she in? He suffered anguish unspeakable in those few moments. Then a low voice came to him, but low as it was he recognised it, and he glared into the receiver as though he were staring into her eyes.

‘ Who is it ? ’

‘ Andromeda ! ’

‘ Perseus ! ’

He heard her gasp with joy, and something like a little cry came to him over the wire.

‘ My dear, I have been looking for you everywhere. Why did you not communicate before ? ’

‘ I have been wandering—and so frightened. Have you seen him ? ’

‘ No. You are not ill ? ’

‘ Not ill as the word is understood. Only very desperate—and very lonely.’

The voice seemed to die away in a melancholy wail.

‘ I shall leave Waterloo by the first train,’ he said.

‘ Meet me at the station.’

‘ Yes. But, Perseus——’

‘ Well ? ’

‘ Do you believe him—or me ? ’

‘ You always. I love you, Andromeda : don’t you understand that ? He is a madman.’

‘ If that were all. But he is more—dangerous. Be careful of him. Do not let him——’

Suddenly the connection was severed. He strove to speak further, but it was of no avail. Yet enough had been said. He had found her, and now he was going to her.

‘Get me a taxi,’ he cried across the hall to the porter.

‘Yes, sir.’

One happened to be passing the door. The porter came out on to the pavement.

‘Where to, sir?’

‘Waterloo. And, oh, tell Smales that I am going out of town for a few days, and that I will write to him.’

The man saluted, the motor cab slid off. He had not five minutes to wait after getting his ticket. It was supposed to be a fast train, but to his thinking never train crawled so slowly. Every slight slackening of speed got on his nerves. It seemed to him that they were continually pulling up at stations and waiting an unconscionable time. Just outside Staines the train stopped, the signals evidently being against them. He thought they would never move on, and only the folly of jumping out and walking prevented him from doing so.

She was there behind the barrier, she and a dozen other women and children. He knew her in spite of the thick veil: he would have felt her presence even if he were blind.

‘ My dear,’ he said.

‘ Oh, Perseus ! ’

But her fingers clung to his, and the very hope and agony of life was in the touch. He drew her to him and kissed her through the veil. Behind the veil he saw that her eyes were swimming.

‘ Oh, my dear,’ he whispered as they left the station hand in hand, ‘ I thought I had lost you.’

‘ Would you be very sorry, Perseus ? ’

‘ Andromeda ! ’

‘ It might have been better,’ she said.

‘ There can be no “ better ” without you.’

They hailed a fly and drove to the hotel. He was still playing with her hand, caressing it softly, gently, and insensibly she seemed to nestle closer to him.

‘ Fate might have been kinder to you,’ she said.

‘ Let me hear no more of that, Andromeda. It did me the greatest kindness I have ever known. It is I who owe the apology. But for me——’

‘ God knows what would have happened,’ she exclaimed vehemently. ‘ Perseus, I am afraid.’

‘ There is nothing to be afraid of now that I have found you.’

She nestled closer, evidently consoled by this assurance. Then as suddenly she drew away from him and looked up into his face.

‘ Have you seen him ? ’

‘ No.’

‘ Do you know where he is ? ’

‘ I believe he is in London.’

‘ In London ! Has he seen you ? ’

‘ I think not—no, I am sure he has not.’

‘ But he is in London,’ she muttered : ‘ we are not safe.’

‘ I think so,’ he answered reassuringly. ‘ Now that I know all, there is nothing more to fear.’

But even this assurance did not seem to give entire satisfaction. The looks she flung from side to side were still full of an intense alarm, and even when the fly drew up before the door of the hotel she seemed to hesitate before alighting.

Her room, or rather rooms, were in the front of the house overlooking the main road, and consisted of a sitting-room and bedroom, the latter being entered through folding-doors.

‘ I came here last night,’ she explained, dropping limply into a corner of the sofa. ‘ At first they seemed suspicious, and asked me where my luggage was. I suppose I must have looked an awful sight : I know I was deadly tired. But I told them that my husband would be down the next day, and I gave them your name. Do you mind ? ’

‘ If I could only give you that name ! ’

He sank beside her and took her in his arms. Then he raised the heavy veil from her face, and though it struck him like a chill to see how pale she looked, he said nothing of it, but drew her close to him once more.

‘ Then you don’t believe what he said ? ’

‘ I know the man was lying, and that he is half mad.’

‘ But if it were true ? ’

‘ I should still remember that I love you, and that I believe you love me.’

‘ With all my heart. Perseus, you can never know how much I love you.’

‘ Have I not had proof ? ’

‘ All that might have been with a purpose. Abandoned as I was, desperate, I didn’t care what happened. You seemed a way out—and a gratification. Luck wasn’t so bad after all. But that was only at first, while my heart was still full of bitterness and hatred. I was suffering horribly: I think I was the loneliest thing in the world just then. Have you ever been very reckless, have you ever felt that you didn’t care a scrap for the world or the world’s opinion? Can you imagine what it is to feel that the whole world is shut tight against you, bolted, barred and double-padlocked; that you are alone, so dreadfully alone that there seems

to be nothing more in life ? Smug philosophy says it is our own fault ; that if we are not petted, caressed, loved, the cause will be found in us. It may be so, but when the ordeal comes we are unfortunately still very human. Then it is that the devil comes along, takes us up and whirls us onward into madness. We don't dwell on the commonplaces of life, we are so wise, so far-seeing, so infinitely superior to our surroundings : yet in those commonplaces lie all the germs of our great tragedies. We manufacture the evildoer for the sake of hunting him down, just as my lord rears pheasants for the pleasure of killing them. Women offer fine sport, Perseus—even finer than pheasants.'

The intense bitterness drove the look of alarm from her face : the lips, always suggestive of mockery, were curling scornfully. Ominously the heavy brows came together, and behind them the eyes seemed to recede, curiously, repellently. This was the mood he liked least of all in her : it seemed to create a gulf between them which he was totally unable to bridge. At such moments strange, half-regretful thoughts assailed him : the horizon grew cloudy.

' Tell me what happened,' he said.

' It's like a horrible dream.' She shuddered at the recollection. ' How I ran I don't know, for my

knees were trembling under me. Have you ever dreamt that you were pursued, and that, though you strove your hardest, your run was no more than a miserable, stumbling walk ? It was like that with me. The man frightened me : I saw madness and murder in his eyes. How I left the house I don't know : how I crossed the heath I have no recollection. But I ran on and on until I fell exhausted. Then I crept under some gorse. Once he passed quite close, shouting my name. He was crying out that he loved me, that if I would come back to him he would forgive all. But I crouched lower, lower into the earth, and presently he rushed by shouting like the maniac that he is.'

' Poor Andromeda ! '

' It 's all horrible, hideous,' she said, shuddering. ' Late that night I crawled into a village and almost had to beg for shelter, nor would they show me to a room until I had paid them. A woman may not do these things : a woman is handicapped all through. Don't ask me to tell you any more : I would forget it if I could. I have a dim recollection of tramping aimlessly, aimlessly until I reached this place. For a considerable distance I kept close to the river.'

' Andromeda ! '

' Why not ! It 's the best place for some of us.

But for you, Perseus, I——’ Again she shuddered, and it needed all his art to soothe her. ‘ Were you sorry that I wrote ? Wouldn’t you rather it had been the end ? ’

‘ I should have known no peace till I found you.’

‘ It would have been such a wrench,’ she said simply. ‘ I hadn’t the courage. You don’t know what a coward I am at heart, nor did I know either until I saw the madness in Digby Brenton’s eyes. Yet I don’t think that it was altogether to save myself that I fled. Do you understand ? ’

‘ Quite.’

‘ And he lied, Perseus, he lied infamously. I tell you this—I who have forfeited the right to be believed.’

‘ I believe you.’

‘ Knowing me as I am ? ’

‘ It is because I know that I believe. Think no more of it, Andromeda, and don’t let the thought of him cause you further terror.’

‘ He is dangerous.’

‘ We shall know how to meet him.’

She caught his hand and pressed it to her lips. Then she looked up at him wistfully, yearningly.

‘ If you have any doubt,’ she said, ‘ let me hear it now.’

‘ I have none,’ he assured her.

‘ Even such a woman as I may learn to love.’

‘ I know—I know.’

‘ It was my first real taste of happiness,’ she said brokenly. ‘ I wonder if a man ever fully realises what he may become to a woman ? Yet I should loathe myself if you—— It was for you, Perseus—the joy of you, the love of you. You made everything easy for me . . . and a woman likes her conscience soothed. But if you doubt, tell me of it here, now. I dare not trifle with this, nor must you. It is all my life.’

‘ And mine. For better or worse, Andromeda.’

‘ I love you,’ she said.

He had never a doubt of it : he did not want to doubt it. This woman filled his life’s cup to the brim : there was no room in it for another drop.

Presently he arose and began thoughtfully to pace the room. In moments of acute mental worry he almost invariably lit a pipe or a cigarette. He lit a cigarette now, insensibly moving towards a small table near the window. There was an empty china bowl on the table, and into this he dropped the match. The window opened on to the street, and with eyes which scarcely saw he looked out. Indeed he was turning away again, when on the other side of the road he noticed a little man staring

hard in his direction. He looked again, a sudden suspicion flashing through him.

This person, though short, was stoutly built. He wore a black bowler hat, dark coat, and brown tweed trousers. A little, dark moustache cut a sharp line across his pallid and somewhat heavy face. Carey Vermont looked and wondered. There was something reminiscent about this person. But where had he seen him before ?

III

DIGBY BRENTON leant with both elbows on the mantelpiece and earnestly scrutinised his own reflection in the mirror. It was a habit not founded on vanity. Admiration of what he saw was not responsible for the act. He was not looking for that which so many people find so easily : rather was there in his gaze a look of fear, a dread as of terror lest he should find that for which he searched. From every possible angle he viewed himself, now pressing in close against the glass until his breath blurred it. It seemed as though he was searching for something in his eyes which eluded his scrutiny. From time to time a short exclamation of impatience would escape him : then again he would smile as if pleased with what he found there—or what he did not find. Occasionally he pulled the lids low down, showing a superfluity of red blood beneath. But when natural, and in repose, there was a narrowing of the eyes, a brilliant concentration of glance which flung a suspicion, almost like a shadow, across his mind.

‘No,’ he muttered, ‘no! It’s all right now—but it might happen.’

But though, like one who determines to oppose a strong impulse, he would turn resolutely from the mirror, always he came back to it, and always with the same eager, fearful look.

‘I wonder if one can see these things?’

The thought troubled him, and he frowned: the mirror reflected the frown, and the thing frightened him.

‘Damn you!’ he said, apostrophising the glass, ‘I’ll have you cleared out of this,’ and he shook his fist at himself. The mirror reflected truly, and again he grew serious, submissive.

‘That’s a foolish thing to do,’ he muttered. ‘Would I beat my own face?’

His mouth curled mockingly: it was as though the very devil of things had entered into that bitter curve.

‘You’re all right, old boy,’ he said, addressing that mocking reflection; ‘you see the humour of the thing. There’s nothing much the matter with a man who sees the humour of things.’

He looked about the richly-furnished room with admiration: he trod the thick pile carpet with a feeling of the utmost satisfaction. The place was full of ghosts, but they did not seem to trouble him:

on the contrary, they appeared to be pleasant visitors. Beautiful ghosts many of them—to judge from their portraits in heavy silver frames. One he caught up from its place on a side-table and set it in a corner of the huge Chesterfield. Then he sat down beside it, and a strange smile broke slowly across his face.

‘ You had wonderful eyes,’ he whispered ; ‘ almost as wonderful as *hers*. The devil ! But I ’ll bend her yet ! Odd that they should dream of being able to flout a man who has made up his mind. Which of them ever succeeded ! I believe they are the only animals who enjoy being hunted. Why should she be different from the others ? ’

He rose, took up the photograph, and put it back in its old place. But that thought of hunting seemed to awaken other and more pleasant memories. He turned to the sideboard and helped himself to a whisky-and-soda.

‘ I drink to you,’ he said, holding up the glass, ‘ I drink to you, dear ghosts of other days.’

He stood, eyes sharp, ears alert, as though listening for some response. Out in the street a van clattered by : then softly there came up to him the jingle of harness bells. His smile deepened. He was in a cab rushing through the night, and beside him was a woman in thick furs, who was

too frightened to speak. She had given him much trouble. He had pursued her through wood and valley, over stream, mountain, but he had brought her to bay at last. And the little collar bells were now jingling triumphantly.

‘It was good hunting,’ he said: ‘and the fool thinks she can escape. Here’s to you, Irene. It must come, you know.’

Her photograph was in the handsomest frame of all. It was a wonderful picture, and seemed to palpitate with life. There was the pouting, scornful lips, the little line between the eyes, the heavy brows. And she was looking out into the world in her fearless, defiant fashion.

He drew closer and closer to it, as though by very force of will he would wrest from her the secret of her strength. But the closer he looked the more scornfully mocking grew the lips, the more contemptuous her glance.

‘You devil!’ he muttered, ‘I hate you!’

He shook his fist at that mocking mouth, but the eyes seemed to smile insolently at his impotence. The word ‘Roma’ was printed under the photograph; his eyes caught it, and memory rushed back to the days of their first meeting. Slowly he had wandered into the hall: without interest he had followed the performance until she had ap-

peared. To him now the rest seemed like a blur, a mist of memory. But he remembered that she had not proved tedious hunting, and he smiled. She was cleverer than the others—oh, so mightily clever. And the trapper was trapped !

‘ She had a lovely throat,’ he murmured ; ‘ such a lovely throat ! ’

She was showing it there in the photograph, slim yet full : moulded exquisitely. The pose was proud, the eyes almost defiant. The curve of chin and neck was perfect. A curious, deep-meaning look glistened in his eyes as he riveted them upon her.

‘ Not quite in that way you looked when last I saw you,’ he said. ‘ You were frightened then : the reckoning seemed so near. And have I finished with my hunting, do you think ? Irene,’ his voice suddenly grew passionately soft, while through it vibrated a note of the utmost intensity, ‘ were the world twice as large it would not be big enough to hide you from me.’

To his excited imagination the full mouth curved more scornfully : the eyes blazed a deeper defiance.

‘ Damn you ! ’ he shrieked, ‘ I hate you ! ’

He struck her full in the face with his clenched fist. There was a shattering of glass and a tiny stream of blood on his fingers. Looking round, he

caught the reflection of his face in the mirror, and with a stealthy, cat-like tread he approached the thing and glared in. Then he glanced nervously round as though apprehensive of another presence. He turned shuddering from the glass and flung himself upon the great sofa.

‘Ghosts,’ he moaned hollowly: ‘the world is full of them!’

IV

A Low tap at the door aroused him. He looked up suddenly, made a quick and strenuous effort to compose himself, and then cried out sharply, 'Come in!' The man who looked after him pushed a pale face through the partly open door. His lips moved nervously, apprehensively, as he gazed across at his master.

'Well?'

'There is a person below who wishes to see you, sir.'

By his manner of speaking the fellow evidently wished to convey the impression that the visitor did not strike him as being worthy of much consideration.

'Who is he? What name did he give?'

'Weston, sir.'

'Show him up at once.'

The man vanished. Presently another knock was heard at the door, a steady and more self-confident rapping this time, and the person described as Weston entered, carefully closing the

door behind him. He was a short, stout man, with a pallid, heavy face and a dark moustache. He wore a black coat, brown tweed trousers, and carried a bowler hat.

‘ So you ’ve come at last,’ said Brenton, rising and facing him.

‘ With all possible speed, Sir Digby.’

There was a suspicion of respectful resentment in the man’s tone, though this Brenton failed to notice, or totally ignored.

‘ Well ? ’

‘ I followed him to the Swan at Staines. The lady met him at the station.’

‘ So ! ’

A curious look of triumph shone in Digby Brenton’s eyes. He drove his hands deep down into his pockets and smiled. Then from a silver box which lay near he took a cigarette and lit it. Evidently the tobacco added to his sense of enjoyment.

‘ At the station, you say ? ’

‘ Yes, Sir Digby. She had arrived at the Swan the night before, and registered as Mrs. Vermont.’

‘ And you left them there ? ’ This in a tone of suspicious irritation.

‘ With one of my colleagues on guard.’

‘ Ah ! Tell me.’

He lounged in the great sofa and beckoned for the man to take a seat before him.

‘ He arrived at his flat in a carriage. The lady left him there and drove off.’

‘ The lady ! ’

‘ A lady, Sir Digby. Passing the door I happened to look in. The porter was handing him a letter.’

‘ Ah ! ’

‘ For perhaps quarter of an hour or so he remained within doors. When he appeared again he seemed very excited and called loudly for a taxi. I also happened to be passing at the same moment and heard the destination given. It was Waterloo. I followed in another taxi, and was behind him at the barrier and heard him ask for a ticket for Staines. We went down together. She was waiting for him.’

‘ He did not notice you ? ’

‘ I think not, Sir Digby. It seemed to me that he was greatly excited.’

‘ So far so good. You will return at once, keep a watchful eye on them, and let me know of his movements. They are all important just now.’

‘ Yes, Sir Digby.’

Cunning eyes looked into cunning eyes. There was no doubt of the understanding.

‘ Are there any other orders, Sir Digby ? ’

‘ Be careful, that ’s all : don’t let them suspect.

And above all things watch him, particularly his coming and going. Should he chance to leave her alone—you understand, *alone*, let me know at once.'

Brenton curtly dismissed the man, particularly avoiding his glance, for he guessed intuitively that there was something in his own face which it would scarcely be politic to let a stranger see. But once the door had closed behind his agent he made no attempt to check the smile which rose to his lips, though his laughter was curiously noiseless, as though too deep for exuberant expression.

Crossing the room he picked up the shattered photograph and brought it under the light. He was met by the same mocking, defiant eyes, the same contemptuous curl of the lip; but the broken glass had made a long scratch across her throat, and his eyes fastened upon it with singular intensity. Then, as though half-conscious of being watched from some odd corner of the room by one of those unseen ghosts, and fearful lest even the shadows might read his thoughts, he threw the photograph face down upon the table and turned away.

He caught a reflection of himself in the mirror and hastily glanced aside. Curse the thing! Why was it for ever reminding him of what he was so anxious to forget? He would not look at it. After to-morrow not one should be found in his house.

He would not look at it : he would cover it up, destroy it, hide it from sight.

Resolutely he turned his back upon it : he walked up and down, now pulling furiously at a cigarette, the next moment flinging it savagely into the empty grate ; now throwing a furtive glance across his shoulder in the direction of the mirror, and now muttering incoherently. Half-smoked cigarettes lay scattered all over the room, for no sooner would he light one and take a few puffs than he would cast it from him with an oath. They smouldered on the table, on the glass of the photographs, on the carpet. Savagely he trod them out, as though the white roll were the white throat of a woman. What a wonderful white throat she had : smooth as the inside of a shell, yet palpitating with life. And that line of chin, that defiant, devilish chin ! His lips burned as though consumed with fire : they hungered and thirsted for the touch of that cool, white flesh.

Odd murmurs reached him, like the memory of long dead words : they were breathed at him from every corner of the room. Many lands swept before his vision, many eyes looked out at him from strange, mysterious places. Now he was in Asia, Africa : amid the glare and glitter of the bazaar : the smell and heat of the East choked his nostrils. It was Cairo now, and now Benares, and he was watching

the ablutions of the devotees in the Holy River. He tried to fix his mind on these, here and there to reconstruct in full an incident: the tingling of the nautch-girl's ankle rings, the twanging of the geisha's samisen. Again he saw across the long, dark roll of sea (most wonderful of sights!), Fuji peeping through the clouds, her snow-white crest tipped with sun flame. Now the Sphinx glared stonily at him across the desert, and buried Thebes and lost Canopus resounded with royal revels. And there, along the Euphrates, where Babylon once blazed in splendour! He remembered a boatman's hut by the great river, and a girl with grave, dark eyes. There was always a girl in the picture. Truly he had been a mighty hunter of women. And a woman was still there, a woman with violet-grey eyes and heavy, creamy lids. And those eyes were flashing defiance at him even now. They had followed him across the world: they would follow him into hell. There was no escaping their mocking light, no charm that would dispel the memory of that scornful mouth. Though he were to hide his secret from all other eyes, though he were to bury it deep down in the earth and pile the Himalayas upon it, yet would she find it out and taunt him with those mocking lips.

His secret! He started, not sure if he had

uttered the word aloud. Then he flung a stealthy, furtive glance to right and left. His secret ! Had he then a secret ? Who said he had a secret ? Who knew ? Not you, or you ! His eyes wandered round in search of the silent ghosts, eventually reaching the mirror. Again he leant his elbows on the mantelpiece and glared in, only to step back suddenly with a cry of rage.

‘ Damn you ! ’ he shrieked, ‘ you know—you know ! ’

Retreating backwards he struck a table. To steady himself he put his hands behind him. His fingers came in contact with a heavy, old brass candlestick, one of the treasures he had brought with him from Syria. He caught it up and sent it crashing through the mirror.

V

ANDROMEDA sat in the dusk at her window and looked out upon the street. The evening was long and warm, and the lamps were not yet lit. She saw the people hurrying by, going home, no doubt, and the thought stung a little, for there was pain in it—perhaps also some envy. Now and again a motor dashed by, all going one way, to London—home! Here a shop-boy whistled loudly, inconsequently; there a heavy vehicle lumbered heavily through the street. Just below her she could hear the preparations of a party of motorists, who had stopped at the Swan for refreshment. It was the last lap on the homeward journey.

Well, she too was going on a journey, and at the thought thereof her eyes softened. She had thrashed it all out with Perseus, had offered him every loophole of escape. But this lover of hers had proved no lover of a summer day, and her heart was full of gratitude and deep affection.

‘I love you, Andromeda,’ he repeated: ‘don’t you

understand. You have become dearer to me than anything on earth.'

'Unworthy me.'

But he would not listen to her self-depreciation, and presently she was laughing up into his face. This tender lover—how she had learned to adore him! Memory played strange pranks: recollection would not be denied.

'But it's all past,' she whispered: 'for the first time in my life I see the light.'

Again evil had brought forth good. Not the good of the creeds and the churches, may be: there was no thought of melodramatic penance, no longing for conventional renunciation. This love, so lightly approached, had suddenly become the most serious thing in life. Suddenly—no! She knew now that it had been gradually stealing upon her life, a sweet stream of light. Wild dreams merged into tender realities: if she could not be one of the great lovers of history, she could be one of the true lovers in life. After all, what was there like this love for the man whose very being had crept into her blood? Great lovers! Was she not then one of the greatest lovers that ever lived? For his sake she would have borne with a smile the acutest agony of mind and body: to protect him she would have bartered her life. Yet being a

woman, and weak even in her strength, she prayed that she might live for him and his love. She wanted his love : all that he had to give. But as yet he must be near her with his kind eyes and his gentle, guiding hands. It was so infinitely sweet after all to look up, to be led. How sweet it was she had never known till now. To her it seemed that her life had been one long struggle with adverse conditions : she had wilfully trifled with the immortal. And now the light of it was upon her, burning, radiant, transfusing the very blood of her into something beyond her dreams.

They were going abroad, they were quitting England until time cleared the way for their return. Even now he was in London attending to the final preparations, and she was waiting there in the slow-growing night for the message which should tell her the hour, the moment of his return. And slow moments they were, even though her dreams were rushing, full. Her love had raised every obstacle of which love could think, but with a smile he had leapt them all. Perhaps she had dwelt more upon the future than the past, for even love renounces with pain ; and one must fight for love even though one may die for it. It was not what had been, but what was to be.

‘ I love you, Andromeda,’ he said.

She knew that with that love was a great, a wonderful pity. Though he tried to hide it, her keen eyes searched it out. Yet rather than be the object of his charity she would have renounced him there and then. Yet she knew that of this wonderful pity was the very essence of his love, the light that sparkled in his eyes, the magic that thrilled through his touch.

‘Have you thought of it all—what it all may mean? Perseus, let me go if the faintest suspicion of a doubt remains. I have unwound the veil of my soul for your eyes to see; I am naked to your gaze, flaw, blot, blemish. There is yet time. I know my world: happy are those who do not.’

‘And if I took you at your word?’ he said, kissing the pink tips of her slender fingers.

‘I cannot tell. But I should not be angry with you.’

He caught her face between his hands and stared long and earnestly into her eyes. Unflinchingly she bore the scrutiny. Then tenderly he drew her to him and kissed her on the forehead. He did not speak, but she trembled strangely, joyously, as one might who received a sacrament.

‘A holy kiss,’ she thought, and her heart went out to him, and through the sudden blur of tears her eyes shone with a new and mystical light.

‘Be careful,’ she said as she clung to him : ‘I am afraid.’

‘Of what ?’

‘That man. He is dangerous.’

He laughed. ‘To himself.’

‘Ah, but be careful, Perseus. You do not know him as well as I do, and of what he might be capable. I am sure that there was madness in his eyes.’

‘The madness of conceit and ruffled vanity. To-morrow, Andromeda, to-morrow we shall spread our wings.’

‘I wish to-morrow was here.’

A great restlessness was upon her : without him the place seemed horribly lonesome. By turns she grew nervous and defiant. The room chilled her, she hated it ; yet she dared not venture abroad. A step in the passage outside, a voice on the stair, caused her to start and turn sharply. Never had she known a like nervousness. Hitherto her head had gone up and her chin out at the thought of danger : she had been a bold and determined fighter in the battle of life, had given blow for blow, nor asked for quarter, nor expected it. But now of a sudden she had grown timorous, fearful, as though that which she at length had found might be taken from her. Harshness, indignity had but stiffened her determination : tenderness, considera-

tion, love, brought uppermost the delicate attributes of her sex. She trembled for him as a mother might for her child. There was no thought of self in her fears, in her musings, except perhaps the thought that to lose him now would be like losing all. Rather was there a vague dread that in some manner harm might come to him through that madman. For while she despised her husband she dreaded him still more. Of his violence she had many bitter experiences, but not until her return to England did she know that he had ever been called 'Mad Brenton.' The name explained much that had been a mystery to her.

'My dear,' her friend Lady Merivale had once said to her, 'how did you ever come to marry that dreadful creature?' She might have told, but she would not: there are here and there little things which we keep to ourselves. But those once cogent reasons which urged her to marry seemed less assertive now. If she had only waited. How many women have thought the same thought, uttered the same wish?

And so she sat by the window thinking it all out, and the night grew, and a sudden, strange stillness seemed to roll across the earth.

VI

STARTLED from her reverie she sat up, ears alert. Then she shook her head and smiled. She was for ever fancying things, for ever dreaming of dangerous possibilities. Even now the thought was upon her that she was not alone. Was that the click of a lock or the sound of a footstep? sounds dissimilar enough in all conscience, yet suggested by she knew not what.

Again that sensation of fear shot through her, a suggestion of indefinite danger. Sure now that she was not alone, yet conscious of an unworthy nervousness, she rose hastily to her feet and glanced timorously round the half-darkened room, her ears sharpened by expectation. But though she heard nothing she was none the less convinced of another presence. Save for the occasional rattle of some vehicle in the street the stillness was most profound.

‘ Who ’s there ? ’ she called.

The tremor in her voice startled her : a curious sensation of fear seemed to set quivering the flesh at the back of her neck. Then with a determination

to probe the mystery, though still entertaining some contempt for her fears, she swiftly crossed the room and flung open the folding-doors. Her husband stood smiling in the entrance.

She stepped back with a gasp: he followed her into the room, carefully closing the doors behind him.

‘ You seem surprised to see me,’ he said.

‘ How did you get here ? ’

‘ Through the door, of course. How did you suppose I came ? ’

‘ What do you want ? ’

‘ Now what do you imagine a husband would want ? Sit down and I’ll tell you. No, please, not quite so near the bell. You are such a head-strong creature—and we must not be interrupted.’

‘ I have nothing to say to you.’

‘ But I have a lot to say to you, so you can let me do the talking. You were really never a good listener: a common failing of your adorable sex. I am sorry. I hope I shan’t bore you. I hate to bore any one—more particularly a charming woman.’

He spoke in a manner that was wholly foreign to him, with an airy indifference which struck her as being infinitely incongruous. Her eyes sought his, and through the half gloom she saw them scintillate.

A great fear struck her like a blow in the face, a

blow on the breast. Unconsciously her hands went up : she pressed hard on her bosom as if to still its throbbing. And all the time her thoughts ran : ' The madman ! How can I elude him ? When will Perseus come ? ' Why had she let him go : why had she not journeyed with him to London as he had suggested ?

He came closer to her.

' You look fagged, my dear. Won't you sit down ? '

It was a command, a command which she dared not disobey. There was a steady, cold authority in his tone which struck her as being singularly ominous. Thoughts of revolt flashed through her mind. Why should she succumb to this sudden and inexplicable fear of him ? In all their bickerings she had never shown the white feather. Scorn had been met with scorn, hate with hate. Lack of courage had never been one of her failings. Yet she quivered with apprehension. Nor at that moment did she guess the true reason of that incomprehensible terror.

Without protest she seated herself in an armchair, her back to the window. He dropped easily on to the sofa and faced her, his eyes in hers, his fingers carelessly twirling his moustache. She thought it looked heavy and forbidding in the semi-gloom,

and once it had almost found favour in her eyes. She was conscious of the banality of the thought, conscious of a multiplicity of thoughts which bore no direct relation to the one thought which was of paramount importance.

‘The days are drawing in,’ he said. She could almost have smiled at the remark: yet she nodded affirmatively. ‘Have you any objection to the light?’

‘None whatever.’

‘You never had, if I remember.’

What did it matter? Every minute was precious now: every moment brought Perseus nearer.

He rose and switched on the electric light: then he crossed to the window and dropped the blinds.

‘That’s better: much more cosy. You’re not cold?’

‘Not in the least.’

‘My mistake. I thought you were shivering.’

He smiled, and for the first time she saw him as he really was. Within the last few days he had seemed to age ten years. His loose, heavy underlip had tightened to the teeth, shortening the lower jaw in a particularly repellent fashion. An added tinge of greyness seemed weirdly to patch his complexion. But the eyes were strangest of all, his glance concentrated, fierce, unnaturally bright.

‘He is quite mad,’ she thought : ‘what shall I do with him ?’ But she succeeded in staring back at him with an affected indifference. In all their many battles of will he had never conquered. He must not conquer now.

‘Do you know, Irene,’ he was saying in his ordinary voice, ‘it seems to me that it is time we made some serious attempt to understand each other. I admit that at times I have been passionate, irresponsible ; but I think you will also admit that there have been times when you would provoke a saint. No offence ; but this is scarcely the occasion for false delicacies. You must remember that you are my wife.’

‘Have you not done your best to make me forget it ?’

‘That is the one thing a woman should never forget. The perfect woman would never forget it.’

‘Like so much between us, we may hold different views of perfection.’

‘Quite possibly. Only please spare me a confession. I really hate them—confessions, apologies, and the like. They are indicative of mental weakness. Such, however, was never your failing. You are not listening.’

‘Yes, I am listening.’

‘But not to me.’ He smiled. ‘Curious that,

for this is really most important: the most important proposition that has been put to you for a long time. I want you to weigh it well, to consider it in all its aspects. Frankly, does it not seem to strike you as unreasonable that I should permit this sort of thing to go on ? ’

‘ What do you want ? ’

‘ You. I have come for you now.’

‘ I cannot go with you.’

‘ You mean you will not ? ’

‘ Put it that way if you like. There is nothing between us—nothing.’

‘ Not even duty ? ’

‘ I gave you duty even when I could no longer give you honour or respect.’

‘ Yet you must come back with me, Irene. I ’m sorry, but it ’s something I owe myself. Come, put on your hat and things. The car’s waiting near the bridge. We ’ll go back to town—or wherever you like. Nor must you harbour malice, nor remember unpleasant things. I was jealous, and your indifference made me furious. I think you are very beautiful, Irene: you know I always admired that exquisite throat of yours. Well, I admire it still. I think you have the loveliest throat in the world.’

She was more frightened of him now than she

had ever been. The very madness of lust was burning in his eyes : his loose mouth worked in a revolting manner. Thought after thought flashed pell-mell through her brain. Vainly she looked about her for some method of escape : vainly she listened for a step on the stair, a hand at the door. If Perseus would come—if he would only come !

‘ That chin of yours is wonderful, Irene : I must kiss that scornful mouth to subjection. It is a long time since you have kissed me—and you are my wife. Come, kiss me now, and tell me how sorry you are. We ’ll let bygones be bygones, only you must be more circumspect in the future. You see, you are my wife, and Lady Brenton is a woman of standing in the county. But we ’ll say no more about that since it distresses you. No one detests more than I these mutual recriminations, or these unceasing references to what is past, dead. You are superb, Irene. How could you think I would let you slip out of my life—into the arms of another ? You of all women.’

She sat staring at him, fascinated. But no words came : perhaps it seemed that words would serve her little in this instance. Yet through her mind a half-fledged thought was painfully winging its way. Perseus might return now at any moment, or

at least a message come for her. At all costs she must gain time.

He sat between her and the door : to reach the bell she knew would be impossible. Also he had carefully shut the window when he had pulled down the blinds.

‘ I wonder what he would do if I were to scream ? ’ she thought.

Screaming might but precipitate the catastrophe. He was watching her with eyes that seemed to read her very thoughts. Indeed she scarcely doubted that he was reading them. There was a cunning look of prescience in his glance which almost paralysed her. Added to the craftiness of the madman were gleams of a super-intelligence. She felt as a castaway who knows that the light plank is sinking beneath him.

Perhaps some of this horror showed itself in her face. Certain it is that a curiously triumphant smile played over his pallid features. He nestled more comfortably into the corner of the sofa as though the better to enjoy the sensation.

‘ You are not frightened, Irene ? ’

‘ What should I be frightened of ? ’

‘ What indeed ! One could never accuse you of wanting pluck. Whatever your failings, a lack of courage is not one of them. You will admit that

among the many who have admired your superb qualities, no one has been a greater admirer than I. Even now, though you treat me with such infinite disdain, my admiration has become such an obsession that I am willing to extend the hand of friendship. I admit these things are exceedingly difficult to explain: there are certain human actions, as there are certain casts of thought, which defy all rational explanation. To be frank with you, I don't think I ever understood you till now. It always seemed to me as though a veil had been dropped between us, which at times seemed almost to hide you, but through which I was occasionally permitted to see your eyes burning. Occasionally, too, I have been permitted to lift a corner of that veil, but nothing more than a corner. Now of a sudden the whole thing is swept aside and I see you as you are. There is not a shred of gossamer between your soul and me. And yet I am not sure.' Wearily he passed his hand across his eyes. 'Even when we gaze into the infinite we are blinded by its immensity. Beyond our farthest star they say there is another star: so beyond our infinite thought stretches a vaster infinity. But if this be so, can there be no end to things—not even to life? Have you ever thought of—death, Irene?' She shuddered, but made no reply. His eyes shone into hers with

singular insistence. 'Many strange thoughts come to a lonely man. You have no idea how lonely a man may feel at times, especially when he is in a big city. I was never lonely when I was in Syria, or in the Arabian deserts, but in London I positively pine for companionship.'

She listened to him like one spell-bound in a horrible dream. Yet through it all she knew that she welcomed his inconsequent ravings.

'Surely Perseus is coming now,' she thought : 'there can be nothing more to detain him. He has not sent a message because he does not wish to put me to the inconvenience, and the risk, of going out. His intention is to surprise me. But he must have started before this. He may be here at any moment. Go on, talk on, madman : I am listening.'

Inscrutable was the smile that played round his eyes, that curled his lip ever so slightly. Had his insanity then gifted him with super-intelligence ? Could he read the thought, the hope that was playing at the back of her mind ?

'You have not answered my question, Irene.'

'Your question ?' she echoed weakly.

'Yes.'

His look of supreme craftiness did not escape her. But she must dally with him. Who could tell at

what tangent his mind would shoot off? In his wandering lay her only hope of salvation. This mad brain was athrob with an abiding grievance. There could be no doubt of the part she had to play.

Yet she did not ask the nature of that question.

‘Tell me of your travels in Arabia,’ she said.

For a moment he seemed to gaze blankly into space. Clearly his mind was shooting off now; and every moment was precious, more precious than all the riches of the world. But almost instantly he was looking at her again, and there was a deeper cunning in his eyes.

‘I have seen death in many lands, under many shapes,’ he said slowly, as one who is drawing with some difficulty a memory from the past, ‘but no one faces it with greater courage than the devout follower of the Prophet. Of course the poor devil is all wrong in his theology: but it has this supreme merit—when the time comes he is not afraid to die. Kismet, he says, and with an idiotic smile on his face turns over, and the door is closed behind him. It’s a fine word, kismet, and avoids all necessity for lengthy and involved explanations.’

‘Perseus, Perseus,’ she moaned, ‘come; for the love of God come to me now!’

‘In death, in life: war, love, defeat, triumph,

kismet explains all. Do you know the word, Irene ? ’

A lump in her throat choked the reply, but she nodded mutely, like an animal that is struck dumb with terror.

‘ It is written. All things are written—even this.’

‘ This ! ’

A weird flash, like the light of an unholy knowledge, played across his face. Through that light she saw the desperate resolve. There was no hope for her now, not even the least vestige. And yet her quick brain, rarely at fault, was striving to find a way out. To rise, to scream, would but precipitate matters. The man, however mentally afflicted, was still physically powerful, and she knew that madness added strength. That way there was no outlet. In a moment those great, lean fingers would choke the life out of her. Desperately she looked round the room, his desperate eyes following her. Almost it seemed as if he read her thoughts, and that he found the process entertaining.

‘ Irene ! ’

‘ Yes.’

‘ You once were kind to me.’

She started, but could not wholly suppress the gasp that rose in her throat.

‘ You, too, were kind once,’ she answered in a low, tremulous tone.

‘ Let me be kind again.’

Was it the cue—the heaven-sent word ?

Her heart almost stopped beating.

VII

NEVER for a second did the fierce, sullen glare fade out of his eyes. Like two burning caverns they seemed to her, mysterious hollows of smouldering doom. If she had never lacked courage it was well for her now.

‘We have been working at cross-purposes,’ she began. ‘Is it not possible for us to come to a clearer and more perfect understanding?’

‘That is the whole gist of the situation,’ he answered with a laugh, a laugh which had a lingering suspicion of mockery in it. ‘You never did understand me.’

‘But what if I understand you now?’

Her lips were smiling: her eyes seemed to entice the very soul out of him. With a gesture, indicative of sudden and inexplicable terror, he shrank back as if to escape her. But his eyes were still glued to hers, and presently reason seemed to assert itself.

‘You are a liar,’ he cried harshly: ‘your eyes are as false as your tongue. There is no truth in

you—there never was. It is time an end was put to your follies. To-day I came here with a set purpose. Can you guess what it was ? ’

‘ It was your love that called you—Digby.’ The word almost choked her. ‘ You remembered that you had treated me unkindly, and you came to make atonement.’

‘ I came to kill you,’ he said.

‘ To kill me ! Why should you kill me ? ’ And, even while she thought he was about to spring, deep down in her soul the dumb cry was raging : ‘ Perseus, Perseus, come to me ! For the love of God come to me ! ’

‘ Because you are not fit to live ; because I think it is the only way out, the only way to save you and others from further suffering.’

‘ Would the killing of me make you happy ? ’

‘ It would be an act of justice.’

‘ But you would lose me too, Digby, and I don’t want to be lost to you. To kill me is to end all—when there might be so much happiness for both of us.’

She drew her chair close to him, with a gesture of disdain he waved her back.

‘ Jezebel ! Do you think I can’t see through those false eyes of yours into that false heart. The veil is lifted. I see into every throbbing cell of

your polluted soul, and I know you now for what you are.'

She smiled reassuringly.

'If you can see into my soul, Digby, I am no longer afraid.'

'Yet it seems to me that you should be the more afraid,' he answered slowly, with perhaps a touch of bewilderment. 'Why are you less afraid?'

'Because if you can see into my soul you must see the love that is there for you.' He scowled ominously. 'Ah, then, you cannot see! You are trifling with me. It is really your wish that I should be misunderstood.'

'No, no,' he ejaculated, a little confusedly: 'my wish is to understand. It is you who bewilder me, you who would lead me from the path I have mapped out—the just, straight path. Take those devilish eyes away. They are eating into my heart.'

'There was a time when you professed to admire them. Have they grown dim, old, ugly? Am I so hideous as to have lost all favour with you? Have I grown cold, do you think?'

'You were always cold to me,' he snarled, 'whatever you were to others.'

A curiously penitent smile crossed her face.

'Perhaps I asked for more love than you ever

offered : perhaps I was half afraid of myself. A woman can never be sure that she knows herself : how then can a man know her ? But what if that self-knowledge has come to me at last ?—what if I know that I can make you happy.?’

‘ Still I shall kill you,’ he said : ‘ there can be no doubt then.’

‘ But if you kill me you will destroy your own chance of happiness. Is it love you want, Digby ? Then let me give you love—love that burns like fire, that thrills the brain, that maddens the blood. All this I can give you : all this I will give you.’

A gleam, even more hateful than that of madness, began to burn in his glance. Yet her gaze never faltered : the alluring smile added a subtler fascination to the bewitching mouth. Through her red lips the very breath of passion seemed to pant for freedom. Gradually she drew closer to him : deftly her fingers worked at the laces round her throat. She saw his eyes fasten greedily on her smooth, white flesh.

‘ By God ! ’ he groaned, and shuddered, as though he had been struck.

Imperceptibly she crept closer to him until her bosom throbbed against his knees.

‘ Since I can no longer be of service to you,’ she said, ‘ do as you will.’

Swiftly he stooped down, caught her up in his arms, and buried his face in her neck.

She struggled, though she knew the folly, the madness of the act. But with her struggles his fury seemed to increase. He blinded her with kisses : it seemed as though he would tear her to pieces in his fierce insanity. And then as suddenly he flung her to the floor, and rose glowering about him like a furious and evil spirit.

‘ It ’s a lie,’ he snarled.

But even this rebuff did not daunt her. Slowly she picked herself up, gathering her scattered wits. Now more than ever was needed resource, cunning—any aid to victory. Afar off, through the dim buzzing of her brain, she seemed to catch the light echo of a well-known step. Though there was no anger in the eyes which looked up into his, there was that in them which he failed entirely to see.

‘ Perseus, come, come,’ she moaned. But she said aloud, ‘ Why should it be ? ’

‘ What has brought this change ? ’ he asked suspiciously.

‘ Love,’ she said, and nearly choked in the saying of it.

‘ Are you sure it is not fear ? ’

‘ Of what ? ’

He laughed. ‘ Come here : let me look at you.’

Once more he seated himself on the sofa and drew her to him. 'It's a lovely throat, Irene. Pity that it should be a nest of lies.' He put his hand into her bosom and laughed again. 'And so you're not afraid?'

'Why should I be?'

But she could not look into his eyes. It seemed as though the very life of her was slowly ebbing out.

'Why, as to that I don't know.' He laughed, again, and this time the sound of it was shrill with madness. 'Yet it would be strange if we came together again, we who have been so long apart.'

'Have we not come together again? What is there left for me to do? Out of your generosity has come my salvation.'

'Salvation, yes. A good word. We all need it badly. And generosity!' He chuckled horribly. 'Ah, an admirable superstition. But I am still a little bewildered.' He pushed her away from him and stared at her with hungry eyes. 'If one could be sure, be sure. But how is one to be sure of anything?'

Uncertainty wavered in his glance. He pushed the fingers of his right hand into his mouth and gnawed savagely at the nails. The action was replete with horror, but she bore it without sign

of protest. For there was more terror in this insane wavering, this futile mouthing of ideas, than in all his brutal fury of passion.

‘ How shall I convince you ? ’ she asked.

It all meant time, and every moment was growing more precious. Outside the traffic was ceasing. Even the ubiquitous errand boy with his blatant whistle had quitted the streets. It would be dark now, and all the lamps alight. And still Perseus lingered.

Would he never come !—would he never come !

‘ Ah,’ he said, ‘ I think I am already convinced. Curious that two apparently sane creatures should so misunderstand each other. If I could only be sure that you love me.’

‘ But I do love you,’ she said.

‘ Then let that be your last lie,’ he replied, and caught her in his arms.

Though her whole soul revolted she did not struggle. It was for Perseus’ sake, for the love of him who had grown so dear.

He pressed his lips to hers and held them there, and his kisses sounded like the snarlings of a wolf. Then almost before she knew what was happening his fingers crept up over her shoulders and round her throat. Too late she realised his meaning and tried to scream, to break from him. The great

thumbs were pressing her like a vice : two mad eyes were glaring triumphantly into hers.

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With the point of his boot he turned the lifeless figure on its back.

‘ It was a pity,’ he muttered. ‘ She had a most superb throat.’

